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Film Genre: The Pragmatics of Classification

by

Marc Furstenau ©

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Department of Comparative Literature and Film Studies

Edmonton, Alberta

Fall 1995

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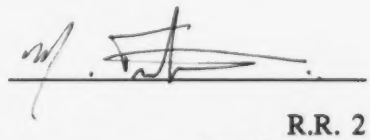

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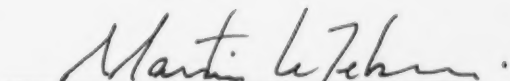

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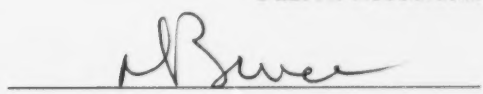

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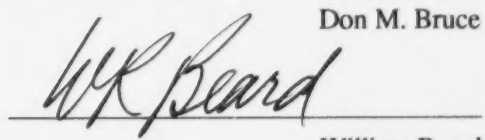

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ABSTRACT

"Film Genre: The Pragmatics of Classification" seeks to address the difficulties of traditional film genre theory which has understood its project as primarily descriptive. This thesis suggests the manner in which one may reconsider the question of genre in functional and pragmatic terms. Conceiving of film genre as a discursive formation, as a conceptual category employed in the reception (and production) of films, rather than as a property of the film itself, the possibility of a more holistic account of genre is offered. The activity of classification is understood in fundamentally pragmatic terms, premised, that is, upon the specific purposes of those undertaking the effort, whether for industrial (production, distribution, exhibition) or critical/rhetorical reasons, thus providing the parameters according to which a discursive model of film genre may be delimited. The means with which film genre may be so modeled are provided, in the main, by recent elaborations and emendations of a Peircean semiotic.

Acknowledgments

A great many individuals contributed in a variety of ways, providing me with the means to complete this project, and I would like to take the opportunity to thank some of them here.

Perhaps most significant has been the constant support and encouragement that I have received from my friend and thesis supervisor, Martin Lefebvre. Animated by a rigour and enthusiasm for ideas that few can rival, he has challenged me to pursue my goals and to constantly elevate my standards of scholarship. Without his guidance and his friendship I would not have had the means to complete this endeavour.

I would also like to acknowledge the faculty of the Department of Comparative Literature and Film Studies, specifically Prof. Uri Margolin, who has supported my efforts over the last several years in a variety of significant ways, and Prof. Paul Robberecht, who provided me with my first challenges as a graduate student. I must also thank Bill Beard, who has shared in and contributed to my passion for the cinema, as well as Marina Allemano and Nasrin Rahimieh, both of whose teaching has inspired me.

Thanks are also due to Ruth Bertelsen and Jack Emack, Chris Gibbins, Monique Tschofen, Don Randall and Jody Raimer, and Kerstin Haßlöcher. Kathryn Fraser, my best friend (and strictest editor), has always been a source of strength and happiness in my life.

Deserving of more praise than I can provide here is my family, all of whom have given me more support and encouragement than I could have asked for. My father, Peter Furstenau, has been unfailing in his assistance, moral and otherwise, always having faith in my ability, even when mine flagged. My mother, Jan Carroll, has been a constant source of inspiration, a model of enthusiasm and effort. Pat Lloyd has, in many ways, provided me with significant moral support. Thanks are due, as well, to Robert Carroll. My sisters, Julie Jackson, Sonia Furstenau, and Jessie Lloyd, deserve thanks, not least for generously listening to my tales of academic (and other) woes. Finally, I must thank my aunt, Noel Richardson, and Andrew Yeoman, who taught me to enjoy life, of the mind and of the spirit.

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Introduction

> Neither in thought nor in perception do we learn to generalize. We learn to particularize, to articulate, to make distinctions where before there was only an undifferentiated mass.
>
> E.H. Gombrich
> *Art and Illusion*[1]

> We are able . . . to read texts that are different as if they were similar because we are able and willing to make the edifying mistake of classification.
>
> Adena Rosmarin
> *The Power of Genre*[2]

I Film Genre and Its Discontents

The field of film genre studies seems haunted by a continued and apparently intractable sense of uncertainty. Each new work on the question of genre typically begins with an assertion of the centrality and unavoidability of the concept, while often noting at the same time the profound lack of a consensus on its very status. Specifically in the study of the American cinema it has become commonplace to insist that a fruitful approach will begin only with the acknowledgment that the products of the cinema are subject to fundamental rules of organisation. It is clear to observers that the classification of films, mainly according to the terms of genre, and both in terms of production and reception, is a crucial, if not the most crucial, aspect of the cinema, and that such classification, as a result, must be accounted for. At the same time, however, the terms of such an accounting have yet to be fully agreed upon. The result in most work on the subject is a constant questioning of the very concept of genre, of its function, its constitution, its existence and its applicability.

Edward Buscombe, in the first sentence of his essay "The Idea of Genre in the American Cinema," neatly encapsulates the tension operative in the field: "Genre is a term much employed in film criticism at the moment, yet there is little agreement on what exactly

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[1] Gombrich 1961, p. 86.
[2] Rosmarin 1985, pp. 21-22.

it means or whether the term has any use at all" (11). Buscombe's comments register not only the strain between the activity of genre criticism and the terms (or lack of terms) of that activity, but also sound a note of despair familiar within the realm of film genre studies, a despair which has served to undercut the very activity of film genre analysts. Plagued by a fundamental doubt, genre criticism seems always to be in the interrogative mood. Are we on the right track? Are we confident of the existence of our object of inquiry? May we continue in the face of such a lack of confidence? Such questions are constantly posed, and are often answered with a grudging acknowledgment that, despite the lack of desired clarity and in the absence of any comprehensive agreement, progress may, nevertheless, be accomplished — at the cost, however, of a certain crudity. Andrew Tudor, in his essay, titled simply "Genre," has also noted the lack of a precise characterisation of genre, suggesting that the difficulty resident in the concept is quite likely a result of its having been elaborated within the realm of literary studies, prior to the advent of a distinct discipline of cinema studies which would require its own precise terminology.[1] "Hence," he concludes, "the meaning and uses of the . . . term vary considerably, and it is very difficult to identify even a tenuous school of thought on the subject" (3). Nevertheless, he concedes, despite the methodological darkness in which the genre critic is required to operate, gains have been made, albeit at the cost of subtlety and precision. "For years," he notes, "[genre] provided a crudely useful way of delineating the American cinema" (3).

In the light of such observations, an increasing number of scholars have criticised the lack of rigour in most film genre studies, despite their almost inadvertent accomplishments, and have issued calls for a revitalisation and a thorough grounding of the field. The primary task in such a project is typically understood to be the fundamental description of genre — a return to first principles, so to speak. The desire is to discover what, precisely, provides the basis for the genre critic's activity, such a discovery understood to afford a certain stability and rigour that has been lacking to date. Buscombe, following his initial comment, briefly elaborates the terms of such a foundationalist desire. "There appear," he writes," to be three sorts of questions one could profitably ask: first, do genres in the cinema really exist, and if so, can they be defined? second, what are the functions they fulfill? and third, how do specific genres originate or what causes them?" (11). As in so many projects thus designated, there is the built-in potential for failure. It may, according to the ontological terms of Buscombe's questions, turn out that such

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[1] Tudor's article, which was originally published in his *Theories of Film* (1973), is the opening essay in Barry Keith Grant's anthology, *Film Genre Reader* (1986).

existence is in fact unprovable, or that a suitably exhaustive definition (read, "description") is unreachable.[1] If this turns out to be the case, which is precisely what I will argue, the project will never find its desired stability nor will it achieve its stated ends.

Buscombe's questions presuppose a certain attitude to genre, namely that in order for local analyses to proceed one must first identify the external and autonomous existence of such an entity. What is genre? Without a satisfactory answer to such a question the project may be doomed to continue its "crude" procession. The question I propose in this thesis is a rather different one from Buscombe's, indeed from the typically posed question in film genre studies, which is neatly summarised in Buscombe's formulation. Rather than asking *what* genre is — a question which will constantly invite revision and for which, I suggest, no satisfactory answer will be generated[2] — I propose to ask *how* genre has been employed as an interpretive category, moving from a question of existence to one of functionality. Such a reformulation offers a way past the necessarily reductive and reifying solutions presupposed by the traditionally posed question, and suggests the elaboration of a discursive and pragmatic notion of genre. Genre is what genre does, to put it rather colloquially. The point is not to analyse a thing but rather an activity. Genre serves to order the otherwise disparate phenomena of the cinema in a manner that enables observers to make sense of such disparity. As such an ordering principle, genre is to be construed not as an autonomous entity amenable to description, but rather as a term employed in the constant project of sense-making that is fundamental not only to film studies but to any discipline. While accepting Buscombe's and Tudor's diagnosis of the field's rather moribund state, the first steps in a resurrection seem, as opposed to a search for a suitably stable foundation, to be toward an avowal of the very activity that in fact constitutes the field, more specifically, toward an avowal of the constitutive power of such activity. Understood less as a "crude" rendering of the truth, genre is rather a practical means of reducing disparity, providing both producers and interpreters with the necessary conditions for undertaking their respective activities. Genre, in this formulation, is to be conceived of as an enabling condition, a premise on the basis of which instructive and enlightening statements may be made by the film critic or scholar, or a specific film may be created by the filmmaker. In each case the process is one of 'rewriting,' of fashioning a template from

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[1] Buscombe's use of the term "definition" for his basically descriptive project is a common mischaracterisation. The distinction between description and definition will be dealt with throughout the thesis, "definition" functioning in a fully volitional and pragmatic sense.

[2] This is supported, I would propose, by the continued re-presentation of the question, in one form or another, in most critical evaluations of the field.

material at hand in order to undertake either a critical or creative project, of deliberately choosing to place a film or films within a category, as a preliminary gesture, in order to be able to proceed — indeed, this is to be understood as the *only way* to proceed.

It is in this sense that I am suggesting a conception of genre in pragmatic terms, as an activity, as a constitutive gesture, rather than as a static space within which specific films may be definitively placed. Genre is *classification*, but is so in a strictly functional sense. Classification — the ordering of phenomena — serves a practical function, and is, as a result, necessarily premised upon that function. To classify is to treat, for our own practical purposes, things *as if* they were like other things.[1] In the most basic sense, then, and perhaps counter-intuitively, to classify is to err, and it is precisely as error that it achieves its productive potential.

II To Err is Human...

When ordering the world humans often fall into error, confusing something for something else, perhaps seeing a floating log as a sea creature, or a tree stump as a hunched animal. We are driven to such errors by the fundamental need to classify the world, to arrange it in meaningful ways, in order that we may make use of phenomena and our experiences of them. These examples are of inadvertent mistakes — which is not to say, however, entirely useless ones. In such circumstances, when one is in the wilderness, such classifying is crucial, determining, for instance, the direction and speed one will travel. We are constantly in the process of receiving stimuli, of confronting the general, and seeking to reduce it to the particular, according to our specific needs and goals. While navigating the world there is a constant need to classify, to put in order, allowing us to

---

[1] The phrase "as if" is used here in the strong sense suggested by Hans Vaihinger in his ***The Philosophy of 'As if': A System of the Theoretical, Practical and Religious Fictions of Mankind*** (1924). Vaihinger's efforts are informed significantly by the categorial philosophy of Immanuel Kant, whose ideas also provided inspiration for the philosophical system worked out by C.S. Peirce, who will figure prominently in the latter section of this thesis. Vaihinger links his own efforts with those of the pragmatists explicitly, while differentiating his approach by naming it Fictionalism, arguing that while "Fictionalism and Pragmatism are diametrically opposed in principle, in practice they may find much in common. Thus both acknowledge the value of metaphysical ideas, though for very different reasons and with very different consequences" (viii). The relation of the two on this point may be explained by their common Kantian heritage, and their differences according to Vaihinger's own emendations to Kant's philosophy, whereby the heuristic aspects of the categories are emphasised. "It can be shown," writes Vaihinger, "and has been demonstrated at length in the present volume, that the theory of Fictions was more or less clearly stated by Kant," and that "for Kant a large number of ideas, not only in metaphysics, but also in mathematics, physics and jurisprudence, were Fictions. The metaphysical ideas were somewhat confused by Kant himself in his *Critique of Pure Reason* (Theory of Method), but were definitely called 'heuristic fictions'" (viii).

make appropriate decisions, to choose suitable responses, to arrive at useful conclusions. Often we will hazard guesses, which are subject to testing and reappraisal, until the appropriate classification is made to suit our specific needs and purposes, the outcome of such a process producing practical effects. To return to our original examples, once removed from the class of dangerous animals, the tree stump is placed in a far more benign vegetable class, allowing us to continue in the original direction without fear of injury. Once the immediate danger has been allayed, however, we may return to the stump, finding pleasure in its resemblance to an animal, pursuing the initial classificatory error for rather different purposes, for the sheer imaginative pleasure that it may provide, putting our classification to a rather more whimsical, but by no means less functional, use.

What such errors tell us is that objects do not fall naturally into one category or another, that they are not members exclusively of single classes. It is according to an individual's specific needs, to the purpose to be fulfilled, that they are placed within certain categorial realms, the number of which is potentially as large as human imagination, but which is, practically, circumscribed by necessity. We may consider this point by way of a specific example. As a car collector, one would need to make subtle and precise distinctions between makes and models, between individual cars, understanding each to be different, each car's uniqueness rendering it valuable, or not, to the discriminating eye. There are, then, according to the needs of the collector, a large, and always increasing, number of classes to which cars are assigned membership. As an urban cyclist, on the other hand, such distinctions become useless, and every car is seen to belong to a single class, each understood as if it were a dangerous obstacle, all cars functioning, for the practical purposes of the cyclist, in a similarly threatening manner, regardless of the sort of criteria applied by the collector. An antique Jaguar will pose as similar a threat as a mass produced Toyota. By construing them thus, the cyclist is able to proceed cautiously, avoiding the dangers posed by the specific members of this posited class.

We are not, in other words, constrained by the natural membership of any individual object in a pre-defined class. We are, however, accustomed to ordering many things in traditionally established classes, thereby enabling a certain productive level of communication and social interaction. Having generally agreed that certain objects will normally be placed within particular categories, we are able, as social beings, to communicate in a rather efficient manner, such agreement having dispensed with the necessity of establishing an object's membership in each new communicative situation. But this is not to say that such classes are immutable nor that they are the only ones

available. There are as many classes as there are potential uses to which they may be put, and the full creative power of classification lies in our ability, as E.H. Gombrich puts it, "to extend classes of things beyond their rational group" (87), to explore, that is, the imaginative possibilities of our mistakes. Pursuing Gombrich's insights, Adena Rosmarin, in her compelling work *The Power of Genre*, has argued for the human propensity towards error and, more importantly, for the creative power of error, noting that,

> humans not only err, they often err willingly and explicitly, for both pleasure and edification. We accordingly 'find' faces everywhere: in pansies, in the moon, in knockers on doors, and, most frequently, in the 'faces' in paintings. And if we look at stars, clouds and shadows we can find anything we want to find, so great is the indeterminacy of such finding places and so willing are we, for certain purposes, to accept the most minimal likenesses as 'like.' Such experiences substantiate Gombrich's thesis that 'all thinking is sorting, classifying.' They show that anything can be taken for anything else if our purpose is sufficiently compelling and our standards of acceptance sufficiently tolerant. They show, in other words, that we can always choose, correct, invent or define a class wide enough to make the desired mistake. (21)

Rosmarin's observations are designed to clear the way for a radically different approach to the question of literary genre, one that would foreground the edifying function of error, championing the productive mistake of reading one text as if it were like another. Rosmarin's theory of genre, in other words, is fundamentally rhetorical, or pragmatic, conceiving of genre in terms of its usefulness, its functionality, and its persuasive power. Rosmarin has quite compellingly argued against the traditional tendency in the field of literary genre studies to conceive of its activity otherwise, in, that is, representational terms. Striving to discern its object in as much detail as possible, and to render it with an objective fidelity to that observed detail, literary genre studies, argues Rosmarin, proceeds according to the metaphors of representation. The determinant metaphorical status of its endeavours, however, is routinely denied. So accustomed have we become to understanding knowledge as something extracted and looked upon that the metaphors of vision have been naturalised. Representational criticism has drawn its metaphors, or "terminological screens," primarily from archeology and optics, but, Rosmarin argues, "with repeated usage these screen have grown transparent" (9). Such transparency functions primarily to reduce the impact of the critic, the activity of whom is understood to be limited to that of observer, whose only goal is to report his or her findings once the object of inquiry has been unearthed. To characterise the critical function in terms other than of discovery and representation is to cast into doubt the validity of critical claims. "We are so accustomed,"

writes Rosmarin, "to discussing explanation in representational rather than pragmatic terms, in terms of what mirrors rather than of what works, that doing otherwise seems strange if not wrong" (8). It is not the power of the critic's argument, his or her efforts, that is, to convince us of the practical value of discussing an object or text in these terms as opposed to those, that impresses us. Rather, it is the capacity to discern, in the literal sense — the ability to see clearly, through to the truth of the matter — that has come to define the typical cast of critical activity. "It has come to seem natural," Rosmarin explains,

> to understand understanding as the result of 'going under' to 'stand' on the bedrock of truth rather than as something that happens when we write or listen well. We habitually discuss explanation *as* excavation, as the removal of obfuscating layers so as to confront the thing or text . . . . And when we perform this excavation well, we habitually discuss our reward in representation's other metaphor: we say that the newly uncovered ground sheds light on (explains) all that was previously dark (unexplained) and that we, its spectators, are thus enlightened. (9)

Rosmarin's efforts are at resuscitating a critical practice that has been for too long devalued by increasingly naturalised metaphors. It is a fully pragmatic and rhetorical criticism, one that does not endeavour to disguise its premises, but rather presents them explicitly as the necessary starting point for any argument.[1] Specifically, genre becomes a term describing the activity of the critic who, for the purposes of argument (and this phrase should be understood in a strictly literal sense — genre as a rhetorically functional concept), will choose to classify a text or texts in order that he or she may say something about them. Further, and perhaps most significantly, such a choice occurs in the context of earlier choices. Previous interpretations, previous classifications, function as the intertextual space within which the pragmatic activity of the critic is undertaken, choosing and correcting to suit his or her specific argumentative purposes. And it is here that Rosmarin is able to conflate what has traditionally been understood as two separate

---

[1] While Rosmarin's work has been, if not ignored, certainly under-discussed, it is part of a larger and increasingly well recognised school of thought, characterised as the new, or neo-, pragmatism, the most prominent spokesman for which has been Richard Rorty, and which includes such practicing literary critics as Jeffrey Stout and, perhaps most notably, Stanley Fish. See, for instance, Richard Rorty (1982), ***The Consequences of Pragmatism***, Stanley Fish, ***Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities*** (1980), and Jeffrey Stout's essay "What is the Meaning of a Text?" (1982). For an accounting of the new pragmatists' gains in the realm of literary studies, see W.J.T. Mitchell's anthology ***Against Theory: Literary Studies and the New Pragmatism*** (1986). Often mischaracterised as a wholesale relativism, neo-pragmatism has been vilified by opponents on both the right and the left. For an example of the former, see Valentine Cunningham, ***In the Reading Gaol: Postmodernity, Texts, and History***, (1994), pp. 50-2. For a critique from the left of the pragmatists' "complacency," see Jonathan Culler, ***Framing the Sign: Criticism and its Institutions***, (1988), pp. 55-6, and his "In Defense of Overinterpretation" in Umberto Eco, ***Interpretation and Overinterpretation***, (1992), pp. 109-23.

activities — the theoretical and the practical. Understood pragmatically, these two realms are no longer required to remain asunder, theory pursuing what is true, apart from cruder practical concerns. It is a theoretical practice that Rosmarin advocates. She explains in a passage which I will, according to its centrality and provision of key concepts, quote at length:

> The interpreter begins . . . by correcting or speaking against previous texts, and it is this beginning that effectively constitutes the theoretical moment of his discourse. Whereas traditional and representational theory conceives of itself as happening after the practice of criticism has finished, a rhetorical and pragmatic theory conceives of itself as a practice that initiates and informs the practice of criticism. Its goal is not the visualization or unearthing of something that already if only "in theory" exists but, rather, the performance of an act: the defining of a critical problem in such a way that its significance becomes obvious and its solution possible. Rather than arguing its validity, its mirror-like correspondence to the not-itself, a rhetorical and pragmatic theory seeks to justify its value as an argument. It presents itself not as an after-the-fact contemplation but as an ongoing inquiry into what works. Far from being disinterested, ideally separated from practice, it is manifestly interested in its practical or critical consequences, in articulating the ways in which theory are and may be pragmatically joined. The pragmatic "ideal," in other words, is a theoretical criticism: a practice that explicitly argues the power of schemata or premises of its own devising to serve purposes of its own choosing. And its "ideal" practitioner is not a passive and pure reflector of the topic discussed but, rather, the knowing agent of that discussion, a thinking being whose choosing, mediating, and reasoning activities are emphasized, not denied. (20-1)

To classify, then, is to define a problem, to organise material in a compelling and useful way, and it is as such, I suggest, that a more fruitful approach to film genre may be elaborated. It is with these insights that I propose a critique of traditional approaches to film genre, and suggest a reconsideration of the study of film genre, to investigate the terms of film genre study according to their pragmatic value in the various discursive realms that constitute the cinema.

III The Classification of the Cinema

The imaginative classifying that Rosmarin describes when we look at the stars, the clouds, and shadows, the "indeterminacy of such finding places" allowing us to see whatever our imagination would like us to see, seems not, at first blush, to have much to do with the cinema, which is not, we feel, so indeterminate a finding place. The terms of classification are relatively clear, to the point, one may say, that they are beyond contention. Asked to classify John Ford's *The Searchers*, most people would intuitively describe it as a Western; confronted with *The Exorcist*, few would dispute that it is a horror

film. Such intuitions, however, are not a firm enough basis for a powerful theory of film genre. That most would readily agree on the classification of such films does not logically imply that they naturally belong to such categories. Along the lines I have suggested, it would be more fruitful to investigate the purposes served by so classifying these films, as well, importantly, as the forces that have come to bear, ensuring that *The Searchers* and *The Exorcist* will be regularly placed within what have come to be seen as the most appropriate categories. The means with which to account for such forces are best provided, I will argue, by considering genre in terms of semiotic, and it is by recourse, specifically, to the pragmatic and functional model of the sign, and of semiosis generally, provided by Charles S. Peirce, rather than the more linguistically oriented Saussurean semiology, that I will turn in order to provide a such an accounting. Such a model is recommended according to its capability to render the systematicity of genre, understood as a culturally designed sign system or interpretive network. It may, that is, provide a way out of the paradoxes generated by most traditional accounts of genre, which are typically premised on the notion of certain core stability to genre and genres, a stability deduced from the widely acknowledged generic immutability of, specifically, certain Hollywood films.

The apparent immutability of the categories that have functioned in, specifically, the American cinema, has been shown by increasingly exhaustive historical research to be rather less certain than previously thought. As the needs of the industry, and of the cinema as a more general institutional phenomenon, have changed, so too have the criteria of organisation. Films are constantly placed and replaced, categorised and recategorised, according to the specific needs and purposes of the various members of the film community. Increasingly, the force of this discursive activity has been incorporated into considerations of genre. As we shall see, the main terms with which efforts are being made to reassess and revive the field of film genre studies are, more and more, precisely historical and discursive. The difficulty, however, is that the temporalisation, or historicisation, of genre, has come without addressing the traditional dilemmas of the field.

One may say that genre has traditionally been conceived in spatial terms, as a form, a structure, possessing a delimitable shape, available as a result to the careful scrutiny of the analyst/observer, mobilising the traditional metaphors of excavation and discovery, of vision and representation. The efforts of recent commentators on genre amount to little more than the combination of such spatiality with temporality. Genre studies has, in other words, been transformed into a search for temporal forms. The very complexity of such a

notion, its reliance on a basic antinomy, has resulted in increasingly complex maneuvers, forcing analysts to concede the ultimate indescribability of their object, of genre, while at the same time conceiving of their project as, nevertheless, a fundamentally descriptive one.

Such difficulties are the result of the acknowledged obviousness of Hollywood's categories of production and reception, combined with the increasing recognition that such categories are subject, nevertheless, to significant alteration. The historical dimension of genre, the contingency of the terms of classification, may no longer be ignored, yet are incorporated into considerations only at the expense of a certain paradox. Typically, discursive and institutional forces are understood to have *worked on* preexisting categories, effecting transformations over time on generic structures, institutional discourse understood to reflect such structures, and to reflect the changing constitutions of such structures. Such discourse, however, is rather more accurately understood as providing the conceptual schemata with which each new film is produced and received. History, the history of genre, in this sense becomes an interpretive history, the complex of previous readings, previous texts, which together informs each subsequent reading, and against which, by necessity, each subsequent reading is performed.[1]

In the move toward such an avowal it is necessary to recognise the degree to which the cinema's strategies of production, and of distribution and exhibition, have informed conceptual notions of the medium, the degree to which, that is, the cinema, as a practical enterprise, has required systems and techniques of ordering. Such systems and techniques have, however, been subject to a certain hypostatisation in scholarly discourse. Fundamental to the cinema as it has developed as both an institution and as a critically considered medium has been the comprehensive organisation and classification of its products. To a large extent, genre studies has been directed towards a recognition and explanation of this fact, without, however, making the necessary distinction between the

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[1] The notion of "interpretive history" is a central one in Rosmarin's work, and is developed specifically in her essays "'Misreading' *Emma*: The Powers and Perfidies of Interpretive History" (1984) and "Hermeneutics versus Erotics: Shakespeare's *Sonnets* and Interpretive History" (1985). As much as the primary text itself, the network of other texts within which it (must necessarily) be seen to exist, is to be similarly understood to require explanation. Concerning *Emma*, Rosmarin insists in her conclusion that "by treating the interpretive history itself as a text inviting explanation, we have found that explaining *Emma* and explaining *Emma*'s interpretive history are not two separate activities but one" (338-9). More specifically, it is only by reference to such interpretive history that we are capable of generating an interpretive problematic, our reading of a text being simultaneously a reading of previous readings. Citing Stephen Booth's characterisation of the *Sonnets* as "hard to think about," she argues that their complexity "is no more disputed than their greatness, and because of this consensus. . .they come to us attended by a voluminous and increasingly self-conscious interpretive history. It is from such a history that a challenging problem can most readily be defined" (21).

activity of organisation and the *results* of such organisation. Genre studies has, in other words, tended to consider the institutional and critical strategies of ordering less as practical, *ad hoc* solutions to a problem — the problem of disparity — and more as an evolutionary progression towards the definitive categorization of the cinema. Genres have traditionally been considered as things rather than as the manifestation of the pragmatic activities of the various agents within the film community. A thoroughgoing reconsideration of genre, then, must take into account the history of the cinema's efforts at organisation, emphasising the fundamental mobility and functionality of the techniques of organisation.

In Chapter 1 I will offer a (necessarily) brief sketch of the historical variability of the terms of classification that have obtained in the cinema. Critical and theoretical considerations of genre have attempted to account for such variability, and it is to several representative accounts that I turn in Chapter 2, arguing against the tendency among film genre critics and theorists to strive for an "objectivity" and fidelity in their efforts. Finally, in Chapter 3, I will outline the terms of a more pragmatic genre criticism, one which, along with the film industry's own efforts at organisation, will be seen as aspects of a larger system of signification, a system modeled according to the processes of semiosis. Genre will, according to such a consideration, be presented in far more holistic terms, understood as system of sense-making incorporating a variety of sense-makers.

Chapter 1

> Perhaps the biggest problem with genre theory or genre criticism in the field of cinema is the word *genre*.
>
> Alan Williams
> "Is a Radical Genre Criticism Possible?"[1]

I Genre History

As the cinema approaches its centenary — if its "birth" is understood to have occurred with the public screenings held by the Lumière brothers at the Grand Cafe in Paris in 1895 — significant efforts are underway to reassess the history of film. Unsatisfied with the traditional linear and evolutionary accounts of the cinema that have been offered to date, an increasing number of film historians are endeavouring to elaborate more subtle renderings of the complex and heterogeneous history of the medium. Thomas Elsaesser, in his recent anthology, *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*, has offered a selection of such efforts by scholars whose work, in the wake of the 1978 FIAF[2] conference on early cinema, comprises what Elsaesser describes as a "New Film Historicism." Concerned with expanding the empirical base of film history, as well as with elaborating more fruitful theoretical models, the new historicists, despite a certain methodological diversity, are united in their efforts to radically reconsider the cinema's first years.[3]

In the light of such comprehensive reconsiderations, the very terms of analysis in film studies are similarly undergoing reevaluation. While reflection on the cinema has existed as long as the cinema itself, it is only in the last thirty years or so that an

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[1] Williams 1984, p. 121.

[2] The Fédération Internationale des Archives Filmique, at whose 1978 conference in Brighton several significant figures in film history revisionism presented revisionist accounts of, specifically, the early years of the cinema. The work issuing from the conference was anthologised in two volumes, the first edited by Roger Holman, the second by André Gaudreault. See Holman 1982, and Gaudreault 1988.

[3] Elsaesser has assumed the role of unofficial spokesman for the New Film Historicists, yet the school is comprised of a quite disparate number of researchers. Some representative works, directly influenced by or inflected by the New Historicism, include Charles Musser's *The Emergence of the Cinema: The American Screen to 1907* (1990), Janet Staiger's *Interpreting Films: Studies in the Historical Reception of American Cinema* (1992), and Robert C. Allen and Douglas Gomery's *Film History: Theory and Practice* (1985). A quite exhaustive bibliography is provided by Elsaesser in his anthology. A brief summary of the goals and preoccupations of the New Historicists provided by Thomas Elsaesser in his *Sight and Sound* essay "The New Film History" (1986).

autonomous field of film studies has emerged, composed of a set of distinct principles and practices, as well as a generally agreed upon body of works. With the establishment of the main contours of academic film studies, a number of observers have undertaken to assess the achievements of the discipline, and to offer suggestions for new directions. Such suggestions may take the form of wholesale repudiations — calls for a return to a "ground zero," so to speak. Noël Carroll, for instance, in his 1988 book, *Mystifying Movies*, which bears the rather telling subtitle *Fads and Fallacies in Contemporary Film Theory*, offers a global dismissal of recent trends in film studies, specifically in the United States. Carroll distinguishes between "classical film theory" and a semiologically based "contemporary film theory," the latter consisting of two stages of development. While the first stage was influenced directly by Saussurean linguistics, the second, initiated mainly in the journal *Screen*, and informed specifically by the work of Jacques Lacan and Louis Althusser, has "towed a strident Marxist-psychoanalytic line," and has established itself in the United States as "the dominant form of film theory" (Carroll 2). Carroll's objection is with the totalizing tendency of this "second semiology," and he is suspicious of its "attempts to answer all our questions concerning filmic phenomenon in terms of a unified theoretical vocabulary with a set of limited laws (primarily concerned with subject positioning) that are applied virtually like axioms" (8). While Carroll notes that efforts have been undertaken to rebuild from within, most notably by feminist theorists, he argues that "one ought not to try to rebuild it. One ought to scrap it entirely" (8). As an alternative to such a grand and unifying approach, to a Theory of the Cinema, Carroll suggests the elaboration of a variety of local theor*ies*, "e.g., a theory of suspense, a theory of camera movement, a theory of the Art Cinema, etc." (8), sketches of which he provides as he proceeds with his critique.[1]

Carroll's suggestions are in accord with the increasing number of calls for more local and specific approaches to film theory and criticism. Following a decade or more of such totalizing gestures, whereby the Cinema has been understood to operate according to a few basic psychical and/or ideological mechanisms, the tendency now is to foreground the complexity and heterogeneity of the cinema. In order to provide the foundation for such a view, scholars have increasingly focused on the minutiae of film history and have elaborated a variety of more localised and specific theoretical paradigms. The New Film Historicists, as a result of access to a vast amount of newly unearthed archival material,

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[1] Other recent critiques include David Rodowick's *Difficulty of Difference* (1987) and David Bordwell's *Making Meaning* (1989).

have produced a picture of the early cinema significantly different from the traditional teleological account, whereby the cinema was seen to have unfolded through the inspired efforts of a recognised pantheon of great figures. Confronted with a great number of newly discovered films (as well as a considerable amount of extra-filmic material: patent documents, distribution material, advertisements, trade periodicals, etc.) that could not be fitted comfortably within traditional accounts, new explanations had to be offered. Narrative structures, generic categorizations, stylistic developments, etc., had to be reconsidered in terms of their particularity within the context of the early cinema.[1] Cinematic narrative, for example, could no longer be considered according to global accounts of the processes of narration and narrativity. Rather than be understood as tentative steps towards a mature and sophisticated technique of cinematic narrative, early film form has been recast in terms of its specific function within a delimitable context. The understanding of the modes of representation of the early cinema have, as a result, been radically recast.[2]

According to the reinvigoration of an interest in the cinema's history, the notion of film genre has been presented as a chief candidate for reconsideration. A commonly voiced complaint within film genre studies is that the field has been reduced to unproductive quibblings over the status of a circumscribed number of films and their potential membership within a few fixed and a-historical genres. Alan Williams, in his programmatic essay, "Is a Radical Genre Criticism Possible?," questions the "tidiness" that characterises most work on genre, a tidiness which belies the actual complexity of both the production and reception of genre. "What the surprisingly stable terrain of genre studies reveals," writes Williams, "as compared to the messy year-to-year reality of genre production, is a desire for tidy bundles of works that can be studied as if they were stable units" (122). Indicative of such tidiness is Thomas Schatz's efforts in his 1981 book, *Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Filmmaking, and the Studio System*, which Williams subjects to a withering critique. Schatz's material, Williams argues, is received, rather than

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[1] The phrase "early cinema" has replaced the traditional designation of the first years of the cinema as "primitive," which carried a rather unmistakably pejorative sense with which the new Film Historicists are concerned to dispense.

[2] See, for example, André Gaudrault, "Film, Narrative, Narration: The Cinema of the Lumière Brothers" (1990), Tom Gunning, "Weaving a Narrative: Style and Economic Background in Griffith's Biograph Films" (1981), Noël Burch, "A Primitive Mode of Representation?" (1990), as well as the essays in Roger Holman's anthology, *Cinema 1900-1906: An Analytical Study* (1982).

derived from original research — it is, for Williams, merely a reinscription of the traditional generic canon which is subjected by Schatz to some minor fine tuning. William's writes:

> The "genres" treated . . . are Western, Gangster Film, Hardboiled Detective (which includes and largely coincides with "film noir"), Screwball Comedy, the Musical, and "Family Melodrama." Why these and not others? One likely answer is that they have all attained minimal critical respectability, in a way that the Sports Picture, the Horror Film, and so on have not. . . . [T]he book is an explicit and on occasion implicit dialogue with previous critics and historians, and its list of genres sticks with those previously studied most intensively. Schatz is not out to break new ground, but to codify, quibble, and clarify. (122)

The traditional assumption of the existence of such stable units, which, as Williams argues, is typically the basis of the genre critic's activity, is symptomatic of the malaise that has beset film genre studies. The difficulty lies in the assumptions that reside within the very notion of genre. "Perhaps," he suggests, "the biggest problem with genre theory or genre criticism in the field of the cinema is the word *genre*" (121). As a concept, genre has been transported essentially intact from literary studies, and has been put to use in the theoretical and critical analysis of the cinema. For Williams, the application of a concept constituted within the domain of a specific discipline to another, and entirely unique, discipline may only proceed by means of analogy. What, he wonders, do films loosely grouped under the designations Western, Science Fiction, or Disaster films, have to do with the familiar literary genres of tragedy and comedy, or even with the romance, the epistolary novel or the prose poem? (121). Genres in film, as they have been identified, are far too transitory for Williams, coming and going with a frequency that is belied by the application of the essentially a-historical appellation "genre." Williams makes the suggestion, perhaps moot at this point, that if film scholars are to continue employing the concept of genre, it may be more fruitful to designate rather more broad, and hence more stable, categories. If the various manifestations of the cinema were to be grouped under the headings narrative film, experimental/avant-garde film, and documentary, then what we presently understand as film genres would be more properly designated as *sub-genres*, whose specific historical and social functions may then be investigated.

What this would not solve however, are the far more crucial difficulties that are the result of the application of a traditional understanding of genre to the study of the cinema. While Williams' initial suggestion might offer the means with which to trace with greater subtlety the historical development of the narrative film, for example, the result of the analogy posited between literary and cinematic genres is nevertheless maintained. The

insistence upon such an analogy has quite likely been the source of what Williams sees as the major problem in the study of film genre: quite simply, as Williams puts it, "the tendency to essentialize its objects" (122), a tendency that has served basically to homogenise the realm of film genre. Once the basic contours of a genre are determined, and understood to be immutable, exceptions that may bring the basic constitution into doubt are, by necessity, ignored or characterised as aberrant. What one is presented with in most accounts of specific film genres, of the Western, the Musical, or the Horror film, for example, is a rather homogeneous field upon which the same familiar films are arranged, and according to which troubling aberrations are effaced or merely presented as exceptions to the fundamental rules of the genre. Typically, as Williams observes, "one gets the impression of a tidy area, indeed. The same films, the same categories come up again and again. Do you need a Western? You'll find a discussion of the films of John Ford. A Musical? Look for the Freed Unit. Don't seek Gene Autry or *The Singing Fool* unless you're fairly adventurous. If you do find them, it will probably be as interesting variations on or departures from 'the essence of the genre'" (122). As a result of this diagnosis, Williams is able to provide a rather concise description of the normal activity of the genre critic, laying bare the typically disguised strategies employed to produce an object of study which is then presented as an *a priori* phenomenon. Williams writes:

> Most genre study is overtly or covertly *circular*. A canon of "Westerns" is agreed upon; "rules" or "conventions" are extracted; other films are then judged by them in order to determine to what degree they are "Westerns" or, for that matter, whether they "subvert the genre." Potential categories that cannot be so easily reified are dismissed. (122)

Such circularity depends upon the identification of certain unchanging core elements that will comprise a genre, elements that are maintained despite various adaptations in the specific manifestations of a genre over time. This is distinctly at odds with the picture that is emerging from recent historical investigations, which is bringing to bear a wide variety of data, cinematic and extra-cinematic, producing a strikingly heterogeneous account of the cinema's history. Genre, far from a trans-historical entity, the basic structural elements of which may be described, is, rather, one aspect of a radically contingent process of ordering, determined by the shifting needs of the film community, and elaborated according to a wide variety of criteria.

II The Transformation of Disparity

The cinema has, in its brief history, managed to produce a dizzying number of films, and continues to do so at an increasingly rapid pace. Within only a few years of its birth, the film industry was to become one of the most prolific and profitable businesses in the world,[1] and, with the occasional lean year, has managed to maintain its vigorous output. In the face of such abundance, both the film industry *and* the film scholar have elaborated various means with which to organise and contend with the complexity and heterogeneity of the cinema. In order for the industry to expedite the processes of production and distribution, and for the scholar to elaborate the means with which to provide plausible explanations and interpretations, each has transformed disparity into similarity, grouping films under a variety of rubrics, establishing links between an otherwise disparate set of film texts. In simplest terms, the vast and varied output of the cinema has, in the name of economy, both industrial and intellectual, been subject to a comprehensive process of classification. Perhaps the most recognisable and accepted mechanism in such a process has been the concept of genre.

The importance of genre in any consideration of American film has been determined mainly by the mode of production that has developed in the American film industry. The American cinema is in large measure a cinema governed by these specific modes of production. The American studio system, while not unique — other national cinemas have developed similar systems — was perhaps the most complex and extensive, and certainly the most successful. Star figures, studio-contracted directors and writers, producers, marketers, distributors — all worked collectively to produce films in a process that had arrived with the modern era, a process epitomised by Fordist assembly line production. Such production techniques determined the nature of consumer products in twentieth-century America, and eventually around the world, and the cinema was by no means immune to its effects — indeed, quite the opposite: the assembly line proved to be the most efficient and profitable means of production in Hollywood, ensuring to a large extent its

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[1] Exhaustive accounts of the cinema's rapid expansion in its first years, specifically in the United States, from the mid-1890s to the mid- to late-1920, are provided in the first three volumes of a projected 10-volume history of the cinema in America. See Charles Musser's *The Emergence of the Cinema: The American Screen to 1907* (1990), Eileen Bowser's *The Transformation of Cinema: 1907 - 1915* (1990), and Richard Koszarski's *An Evening's Entertainment: The Age of the Silent Feature Picture, 1915 - 1928* (1990).

success, as well as emphasising its participation within the general condition of modernity.[1]

As a result, the history of the cinema, specifically American cinema, is often cast as the history of genres. In a medium that is so markedly industrialised, whose products are so immediately commodifiable, the concept of genre, as adopted from literary studies, has provided the film scholar with a familiar and ready means of organization. The mobilisation within film studies of such a concept, however, has been effected to a significant degree according to a certain simplification of the history of differentiation in the cinema. The relatively few categories utilised by the contemporary genre critic efface the complexity of the shifting modes of classification that have been elaborated within the industry over the last century. Eileen Bowser, in her recent book *The Transformation of the Cinema*, traces the fortunes of the industry between the years 1907 and 1915, crucial years during which the infant medium fully established itself as an industrial and commercial force. These were the years of the Nickelodeon, the main element in the establishment of the cinema as a mass phenomenon. These were also the years during which the middle-classes were convinced to join the workers and immigrants at the movie houses, thereby providing the film industry with an appropriately stable audience, an audience with whom certain implicit agreements would be made. The pact that developed ensured that the conditions of viewing would be maintained at an appropriate level, that films would be rather more high-minded than the earlier, and supposedly more vulgar, products of the first years, and that a variety of familiar patterns would govern the

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[1] The details of the cinema's economic and technological development have increasingly been subject to scrutiny. Armed with more sophisticated methodologies and access to an ever increasing amount of extra-cinematic archival material, scholars have provided radically different and significantly more subtle characterisations of the cinema's early years. For a study of the American cinema *qua* business, see John Izod's study *Hollywood and the Box Office, 1895-1986* (1988). An account of the establishment of Hollywood's international industrial preponderance is provided by Kristin Thompson in her *Exporting Entertainment: America in the World Film Market, 1907-34* (1985). For a very useful work on the relation of American film style and production techniques, see David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson, *The Classic Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (1985). Tino Balio has updated and expanded his classic anthology on the economic history of the American cinema, *The American Film Industry* (1985). For an account of another, and often ill considered, aspect of the industry, namely film exhibition, see Douglas Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States* (1992). The question of the cinema's relation generally to modernism, and to the conditions of modernity specifically, has been stymied, to a significant degree, by the peculiarity of the medium's history. Its origins in the industrial context of the late nineteenth century, linking it historically with the conditions of modernity, and its development of an aesthetic modernism, understood to be possible in an artform only with a certain degree of maturity and hence really only seen in the cinema in the second half of the twentieth century, has led to a tendency to describe the cinema's status, as John Orr does, in his *Cinema and Modernity* (1993), as "paradoxical" (1-13). See also, Maureen Turim's characterisations of the "Cinemas of Modernity and Postmodernity" (1991).

production of films in order that the bourgeois film-goer and his family would be able to tell in advance what to expect of the latest matinee release. According to such concessions, the industry was able to convince a significant segment of the population to embark upon a movie-going career. At the same time, significantly, the terms of production were streamlined with the rationalisation of the manufacturing process according to the resultant demands of an ever increasing mass market. Bowser, in a chapter concerned specifically with the development of genre film, begins by observing that: "Genre may be considered as standardization of the film product. The audience has some idea what to expect from a comedy or Western, just as consumers know what to expect when they order a specific kind of sausage. Genre films," she acknowledges, "certainly existed before this period [1907 - 1915], but with the organization of the industry they were incorporated into the system of production, distribution and exhibition" (167).

With works such as Bowser's, and others, the function of genre, as an element of the larger process of distinction and classification, in the history of Hollywood production and distribution has been chronicled with considerably more subtlety and precision. By expanding the parameters of historical research to include distribution materials, exhibition guides, industry memoranda, fan magazines, trade periodicals, etc., the terms of distinction that have been employed at various times in the industry's history have been shown to be subject to significant and considerable variability, depending, of course, on the specific needs of the industry. Films have been ordered according to a variety of criteria, depending on certain choices of emphasis. No single element has functioned as the key to the organisation of films. Rather, depending on the specific purpose to be served, certain aspects of a film may be isolated and employed in a process of distinction. A film's subject matter may be foregrounded, or its thematic content.

Alternatively, a film may be categorised according to its narrative structure or the manner of its resolution. A survey of the preference of filmgoers in the Fresno area, published in the 1925 *Film Daily Yearbook of Motion Pictures*, distinguishes between Mystery, Melodrama, Comedy, Historical, Sex Drama, and Costume. An earlier poll, from 1923, lists Western and frontier stories, Comedies, Detective stories, Love stories, Society life, Serials, Sad-ending stories and tragedies.[1] A crucial, and far more fundamental, distinction served in earlier years, whereby films were differentiated

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[1] For details see Koszarski 1990, pp. 29-30.

Fig. 1 Harold Lloyd on the cover of *Balaban and Katz*, April 1, 1926. (Adapted from Kozarski 1990: 305)

Fig. 2 Poster for Buster Keaton's *The General* (1926). (Adapted from Kozarski 1990: 302)

according to whether they were presentations of real events, or representations of fictional events. The "actuality" and the "story film" were, at the turn of the century, the two main categories operative in promotional and production literature. By 1903 - 1904, a struggle between the two forms was initiated as audiences' preferences turned towards the story film. With time, and with the technical possibility of increasing the length of films, the feature fiction film assumed preeminence, which in turn necessitated further and more subtle differentiations, such as those listed above.[1]

As the industry developed, becoming increasingly diverse, further criteria for classification developed. The public, through the growth of fan magazines and other promotional literature, became increasingly aware of the names and activities of specific

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[1] See Musser 1990, pp. 337-69, for an account of the struggle. Already in the early years, though, finer distinctions were made within the broader categories of actualities and story films. Musser considers, among others, bad-boy films, fire rescue films, the fairy-tale genre, play and musical comedy adaptations, social issue dramas, among the story films, and boxing matches, baseball movies, historicals, travel films, among the actualities. Other films fell outside the boundaries of the two main categories, e.g., trick films, facial expression films, etc. (Musser, passim).

individuals who would be linked with certain kinds of films and would serve as semantic markers for audiences. Actors such as Harold Lloyd, Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton were associated primarily with film comedies. (See Figs. 1-2) Tom Mix, William Hart and Bronco Billy became linked to action films set in the wild west. Generic distinctions thus became increasingly subtle, so that one could characterise a film not simply as a comedy or

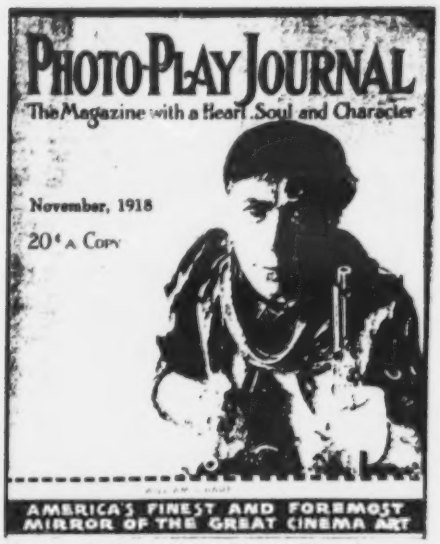
PHOTO-PLAY JOURNAL
The Magazine with a Heart, Soul and Character
November, 1918
20¢ A Copy
AMERICA'S FINEST AND FOREMOST
MIRROR OF THE GREAT CINEMA ART

Fig. 3 William Hart, *Photo Play Journal*, Nov. 1918. (Adapted from Kozarski 1990: 280)

Fig. 4 Poster for Charlie Chaplin's *The Kid* (1920). (Adapted from Lloyd 1988: 30)

a Western, but more precisely as a Chaplin comedy or as a Hart Western (See Figs. 3-4). Such personality markers occasionally overshadowed the specifically generic, so that films that might otherwise be seen to belong to a variety of genres were ordered according to the presence of a specific lead actor. Douglas Fairbanks' persona, for instance, while not clearly tied to a specific genre, stood for action and adventure generally, often with a dose of rather wry humour. Whether in the role of a swashbuckling pirate, an Arabian adventurer, a medieval knight, an urban sophisticate, or a frontier cowboy, Fairbanks' presence in a film provided the audience with the promise of gymnastic action and daring exploits, tempered by the worldly image of the star (See Fig. 5). Female stars as well, such as Mary Pickford, Gloria Swanson, Clara Bow, Theda Bera and Pola Negri, each established distinctive personas, and became associated with a variety of film types related to the specific aspects of such personas.

Fig. 5 The elaboration of the sophisticated image of Douglas Fairbanks, *Motion Picture*, aug. 1918. (Adapted from Kozarski 1990: 269)

Fig. 6 *Heaven Can Wait* (1943) marketed according to the "Lubitsch Touch." (Adapted from Lloyd & Robinson 1983: 27)

Film directors, too, were employed in the project of distinction and classification. As Hollywood began importing directors from Europe, the task was undertaken to provide them with similar star personas and to establish in the minds of audiences relationships between individual directors and specific film styles and types. Ernst Lubitsch, who had achieved success in the German cinema, and whose films were increasingly popular internationally, became a much sought after figure. In the period following World War I, German films had had limited success in America. Lubitsch's 1919 film, *Madame Dubarry*, however, was an exception, generating an unprecedented amount of enthusiasm at its New York debut. Lubitsch's success distinguished him from other German directors, and he became a hotly contested prize in Hollywood. As Richard Koszarski observes, of the various German films premiering in America, "[o]nly those directed by Ernst Lubitsch seemed surefire successes, and a race to lock up Lubitsch, his films, and his star, Pola Negri, soon became the obsession of Hollywood dealmakers" (250). While Lubitsch's tenure in Hollywood was not a comprehensive success — his efforts at historical spectacles

were box-office disappointments[1] — his comedies of manners were marketed effectively according to the elaboration of the notion of "the Lubitsch touch" (See Fig. 6) Lubitsch's comedies were distinguished from others by their attention to detail, and by their irony and sophistication. In critical and promotional literature, a Lubitsch film was differentiated from the rather more broad comedy of the slapstick tradition.

Prior to the importation of Lubitsch and other continental directors, and the efforts to market such figures through the ascription of specific stylistic and thematic tendencies, Hollywood had already established a number of domestic figures as distinct and recognisable "trademarks." Films were advertised by explicit reference to the director. Names such as D.W. Griffith, Thomas Ince, Mack Sennett, Cecile B. DeMille, and others, provided distributors with the means of readily identifying and classifying films for audiences (See Fig. 7). Periodicals such as *Motion Picture Magazine*, *Photoplay*, *Moving Picture World*, *The Motion Picture News*, etc., provided, in addition to the promotion of film stars, profiles of directors and critical assessments of their techniques. The public, on the basis of such material, would be capable of assessing a film advertised beneath the name of a specific director.[2]

Classifications were also determined according to more specifically technical criteria. During the transition to sound, a basic distinction functioned between those films that spoke and those that were still silent. Other aspects were either ignored or subordinated to the primary criterion, namely the picture's soundtrack. Prior to the specific

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[1] Koszarski, pp. 250-1.

[2] The status of such figures as, precisely, "trademarks" was understood quite literally, and considerable efforts were made to assess the recognisability and the relative popularity and drawing power of stars and directors, as well as the popularity of various kinds of films. Polls were conducted by magazines such as *Photoplay* and *Film Daily*, asking readers to rank their favourite stars. More rigorous analyses of the viability of star figures and of their value to the industry were also undertaken. Wall street analysts Halsey, Stuart and Company, in a prospectus entitled "The Motion Picture Industry as a Basis for Bond Financing," assessed the financial value of star figures according to the terms of cost analysis, concluding that stars' salaries, while preferably contingent upon the financial success of the vehicles they guided, were necessary and fruitful investments. They wrote:

> In the "star" your producer gets not only a "production" value in the making of his picture, but a "trademark" value and an "insurance" value, which are very real and very potent in guaranteeing the sale of this product to the cash customer at a profit. It has been amply demonstrated that the actual salaries (not the mythical exaggerations) paid to motion picture actors, however famous, are determined by the law of supply and demand in exactly the same way as are the rewards of executives in the business world. (Quoted in Tino Balio, ed., *The American Film Industry*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976: 179-80).

See also, Bowser 1990, pp. 167-8, for the results of regional polls, designed to identify preferences among filmgoers according to types of films, and the direct influence of such results on the advice and instructions offered to scriptwriters.

elaboration of the Musical category, for example, there were, as an advertisement for the

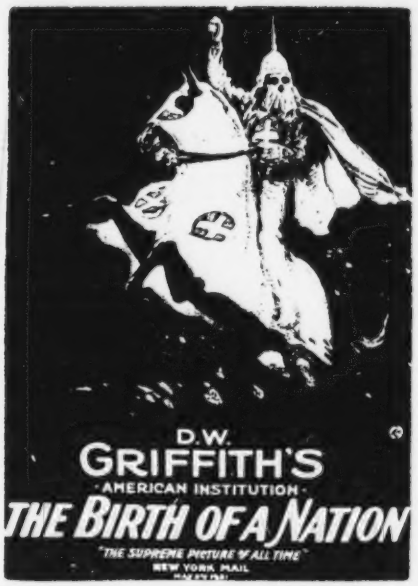

Fig. 7 D.W. Griffith given top billing in poster advertising his *The Birth of a Nation* (1915). (Adapted from Lloyd 1988: 26)

Fig. 8 The Hepworth company's Vivaphone process. (Adapted from Lloyd 1988: 84)

Vivaphone process proclaimed, simply "pictures which sing and talk" (See Fig. 8). A Fox film, *In Old Arizona*, is marketed as "an epical advance in talking pictures." One of the first sound films shot on location, it is presented as a "100% sound picture," the quality of which "will answer all questions regarding the possibilities of talking pictures" (See Fig. 9). Later technical advances, such as Technicolor, 3-D, Cinemascope, Vistavision, Sensurround, etc., were commonly incorporated into marketing strategies, providing key terms of distinction (See Figs. 10-11).

The combination of various criteria was a common strategy, as each film was presented as a unique variation on a popular theme. *The Band Wagon* is presented as a "Technicolor musical" (See Fig. 12). *Naughty Marietta* is both "Victor Herbert's" and "MGM's great musical romance," invoking the reputation of the director as well as the studio, and combining two generic paradigms, the musical, elaborated according to the means of presentation, and the romance, describing the terms of the narrative (See Fig. 13). *The Dancing Pirate* is "The first Dancing Musical in 100% Technicolor," and *Man From Rainbow Valley* is "The First of a New Series of Color Westerns in Magnacolor

Starring a Romantic New Team" (See Figs. 14-15). The combinations were often even more idiosyncratic, so that *The Desert Fox* is classified according to its previous incarnation as a best-selling book, its affiliation with the adventure story, and its veracity, while Nicholas Ray's *In a Lonely Place* is characterised in promotional material as "the Bogart Suspense Picture with the Surprise Finish" (See Figs. 16-17).

Fig. 9 Sound as the primary criterion in the marketing of *In Old Arizona* (1929). (Adapted from Lloyd 1988: 85)

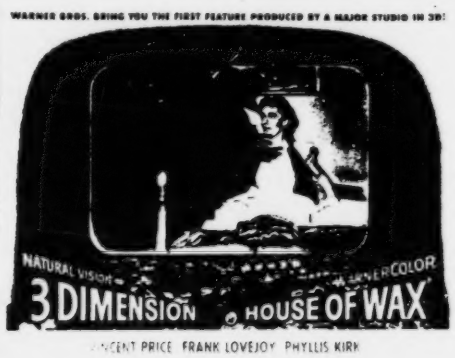
WARNER BROS. BRING YOU THE FIRST FEATURE PRODUCED BY A MAJOR STUDIO IN 3D!
NATURAL VISION
WARNER COLOR
3 DIMENSION
HOUSE OF WAX
VINCENT PRICE FRANK LOVEJOY PHYLLIS KIRK

Fig 10 *House of Wax* (1953), shot in "Natural Vision," "Warner Color," and 3-D. (Adapted from Lloyd 1988: 231)

This discourse of differentiation, manifested in a wide variety of media, efficiently organised and commodified the products of the cinema, yet has been constantly subjected to adjustment and rearticulation, as different categories and criteria of classification have been mobilised. Even a cursory glance at the cinema's marketing discourse suggests the degree to which the terms of classification are modified, each new release represented as effectively reconfiguring the terms established by previous films. The history of generic organisation is, primarily, a history of particularisation, rather than of generalisation. Familiar terms have been, and continue to be, employed, typically in some sort of combination, and are regularly accompanied by a variety of other "non-generic" criteria, in order to distinguish pictures from one another, stressing what is different, while necessarily acknowledging broad domains of similarity within which the differences

achieve a certain currency.[1] Even in the early years of the cinema, films were characterised according to a specific classificatory history, against which they were posited as novel achievements within a specific tradition, or from which they were seen as distinct departures.[2] This is often at odds with traditional notions of the inchoate status of genres in the cinema's early history, which are understood to have been relatively simple in constitution, becoming increasingly elaborate only with the accumulation of history. The Western, especially, is typically characterised according to such a pattern of development. That this is an unsatisfactory characterisation of the activity of generic classification is supported by considering contemporary discursive material.

Fig. 11 Phil Karlson's *Hell Island* (1955) as a Vistavision Picture. (Adapted from Lloyd 1988: 231)

Steve Neale has noted that the first fully articulated example of the Western, as it is traditionally considered, is understood to have been Porter's 1903 film, for the Edison Company, *The Great Train Robbery*. Such a characterisation, however, is quite likely an anachronism. Neale cites Eric Partridge's *Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*, which, Neale observes, "dates the first colloquial use of the term 'Western' in anything other than an adjectival sense to around 1910" (1990: 52). As further evidence Neale notes that, "[t]he first use of the term cited in the *Oxford English Dictionary* with reference to a film dates from 1912, occurring in a review of *The Fight at the Mill* (1912) in an issue of the trade magazine, *The Moving Picture World*, dated 27 July" (52-3). Neale offers as

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[1] That is, a film is distinguished by reference to the terms with which previous films had been classified. If a film is a musical, it is so only in so much as it is a different kind of musical, or the best musical, or a modern musical, etc. It may also, of course, be a Musical Western, or a Singing, Dancing Gangster Farce. The combinations are unlimited. Genre has traditionally been characterised as a regime of similarity and difference, but difference has quite comprehensively been subordinated to similarity. In tracing a genre's history, its pattern of development, it is, necessarily, similarity that must be emphasised, in order to make the appropriate links, with difference usually functioning as an indication of the genre's progress towards full articulation. Such difficulties will be considered in detail below.

[2] This is not to deny that in the cinema's first years there was necessarily a limited cinematic tradition within which classifications could be effected, and that it was primarily to extra-cinematic criteria that recourse was made (although its own classificatory history was very quickly established, mainly according to the medium's own peculiar characteristics). The importance of such external criteria in accounts of the development of generic regimes is stressed by Neale (1990) as well as by Alan Williams (1984). It is important to acknowledge, however, that the extra-cinematic has provided terms of classification for the cinema throughout its history, and continues to do so. It is significant not only when considering the initial elaboration of the cinema's regimes of classification, but for the entire breadth of its history.

Fig. 12 *The Band Wagon* (1953) — a "technicolor musical." (Adapted from Lloyd 1988: 207)

illustration an ad for the film, as well as several other similarly classified films, from an earlier issue of the magazine (See Fig. 18), which employs the term "Western." It functions, however, and this is not directly addressed by Neale, primarily to modify the more significant noun, "American," which is used to classify the films offered to the exhibitor, stressing the production company as the main organising criterion, the products of which are further sub-divided according to thematic content, setting, type of action, etc.[1] What is perhaps most interesting about the ad, however, is not so much its philological value, determining the first use of a specific term, but rather the quite pronounced mobility of terms that are employed and the breadth of references made in the project of classifying the films. In its efforts to sell the pictures to exhibitors, the American Film Manufacturing Company is concerned both to distinguish its products from earlier films and to characterise them as (exemplary) participants in certain dramatic and iconographic traditions. Its films are, first of all, "good" Westerns, or the "best" Westerns, differentiated from other films, classified according to their concern with similar settings and situations. None of them are simply Westerns: *It Pays to Wait* is a "Western Comedy" with "Natural Situations backed by side-splitting pantomime and superfine photography"; *The Fight at the Mill* is a "distinctly

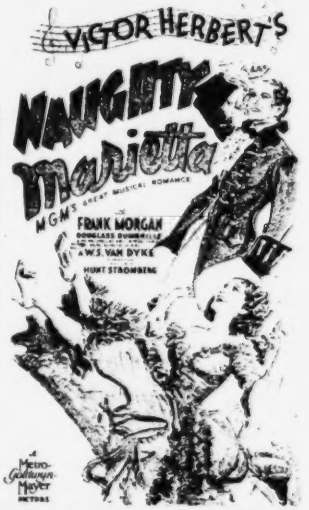

Fig. 13 *Naughty Marietta* (1935) as "MGM's Great Musical Romance." (Adapted from Lloyd 1988: 202)

[1] Several other terms are employed in the ad, including "Historical," as well as "Western" functioning itself as a noun, which is modified by an adjectival phrase — an "out-of-door western." The transformation of terms from adjectival to noun status in the generic characterisations of films is considered by Rick Altman in an unpublished essay on film genre, "Reusable Packaging: Generic Products and the Recycling Process" (n.d.).

unusual" Western, "powerful" and "containing a beautiful story"; *A Life for a Kiss* is a "fighting Western," while at the same time it tells a "pretty story." Each is related explicitly to other terms of classification, to comic traditions, to the melodrama, to romantic narratives, etc., as well as to traditions of frontier landscape painting and photography, and the thematic and narrative concerns of frontier and Western literature. Such efforts to distinguish one's productions from the competitor's is a constant factor in marketing efforts. Typically it is according to a certain hyperbole, so that, for instance, *Custer's Last Stand* is "the greatest wild west feature ever filmed" (See Fig. 19). In a rather stark example of distinction, Bill Cody's pictures are advertised by Jesse Goldburg as, simply, "Westerns that are Different" (See Fig. 20), and in a quite peculiar combination of traditions, *Powdersmoke Range*, with a rather eclectic and extensive gathering of cowboy stars with often very different images and approaches, is presented as "the Barnum and Bailey's of Westerns" (See Fig. 21).

Fig 14 Poster for *The Dancing Pirate*. (Adapted from Lloyd & Robinson 1983:164)

A *critical* discourse quickly grew out of this primary and essentially *economic* discourse, establishing a certain autonomy, but employing nevertheless the main terms of distinction as they had been elaborated. The variability and mobility of the industry's discourse, however, was eventually reduced in favour of a necessarily more static discourse of explanation. Initially, the relationship between the two discursive realms was quite intimate, and was so unabashedly. Critical discourse, from journalistic reviews to efforts at more scholarly considerations, directly supported the distribution efforts of the industry. Many of the movie periodicals were underwritten by and in the direct service of the studios, and functioned mainly to create an environment of audience awareness, disseminating the key terms of distinction so that filmgoers might develop a sense of discrimination. Hugo Münsterberg, for example, a respected psychologist from Harvard, contributed to the journal *Exceptional Photoplays*,

Fig. 15 *Man From Rainbow Valley*, marketed according to a variety of criteria. (Adapted from Lloyd and Robertson 1983: 164)

A GREAT BEST-SELLER! A FABULOUS ADVENTURE...A TRUE STORY!
Rommel
JAMES MASON · HARDWICKE · TANDY · ADLER · NUNNALLY JOHNSON · HENRY HATHAWAY

Fig. 16 *The Desert Fox* (1951), marketed according to its veracity. (Adapted from Turner 1986: 41)

one of, and the most high-minded of, the three journals published by the industry-created National Board of Review.[1]

Eventually, however, a more autonomous critical realm was established, which sought, importantly, to distinguish itself from the rather more base commercial interests of the film industry, employing, nevertheless, terms elaborated mainly within the industry itself. Such terms were effectively hypostatised, their number reduced, and were put into a critical service that understood itself in significantly non-pragmatic terms. What had functioned as practical techniques of ordering, then, quickly became naturalised in critical discourse. While there have been a variety of criteria employed by the cinema to distinguish between its films, only certain kinds have functioned in critical accounts, according to a specific methodological limitation. Distinguished from the practical activities of the industry, the genre critic's goal has typically been opposed to such practical concerns. From the variety they have sought to abstract certain unchanging elements, which would be understood to comprise basic generic structures.

A further distinction was developed within the critical realm, according to the original terms of separation from the industry itself, so that the more practical and

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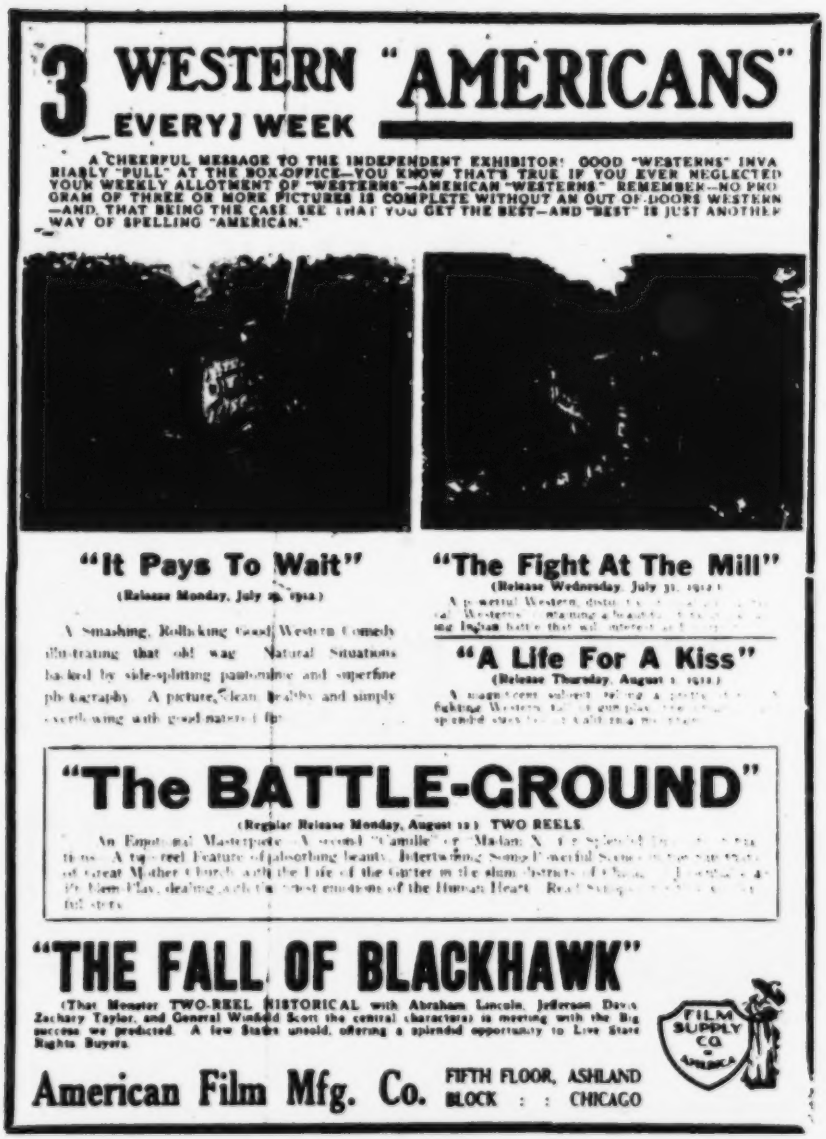
[1] The others were *The Photoplay Guide*, which listed films in release with annotations regarding the films' suitability for various audiences, and *Film Progress*, which provided more elaborate reviews of the films. *Exceptional Photoplays*, according to National Board of Review's executive secretary, offered "critical appraisal of films adjudged to have unusual merit or significance in the development of motion picture art" (Wilton A. Barrett, "Better Films Movement to 1923," *Film Daily Yearbook of Motion Pictures* 1924: p. 499.) For a discussion of the rather complex relationship between the film industry, its self-appointed censorship apparatus (the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, the National Board of Review, the National Committee for Better Film), and a critical film culture, see Koszarski 1990, pp. 191 - 210.

pragmatic critical activity was distinguished from a firmer and more objective theoretical endeavour. The theorist, as opposed to the critic (who simply employed the terms of classification), sought to investigate the terms' very constitutions. The separation of the two realms, as we shall see, has been a perennial source of conflict and uncertainty, as the emphasis has swung back and forth between the two poles, each requiring a refusal of the other.

Fig. 17 *In a Lonely Place* (1953), marketed according to the star, the film's affect and the manner of resolution.

Over the course of this thesis I will argue for a reconciliation, along the lines suggested by Rosmarin, of the theoretical with the practical. The genre theorist has endeavoured, in large part, to discover what has provided the foundation for critical (and by extension, industrial) activity, and has done so according to its belief in the existence of a basically stable generic core, which, while subject to certain historical alterations and modifications, remains fundamentally the same. It is in such terms that the familiar patterns of similarity and difference are presented in film genre theory, but without fully considering the profound significance of difference. Rather than seeking a purity, endeavouring to determine finally what genre is, it is more instructive to consider how generic (and other) criteria have functioned in the process of particularisation.

As we have seen, from the earliest years of American film the exigencies of both production and reception have determined the contours of the cinema, contours that have been described mainly according to the notion of genre. But how do such generic products 'mean,' how, that is, do genres function for interpreters, rendering a film meaningful? Beyond the specific details of production, how does genre function as, precisely, an interpretive tool? Is the determination of a film by the director, or by the producer or the distributor, as a Western, or as a comedy, a romance, a gangster film, sufficient? Or must we rely on the evaluation of the critic? Are the elements with which one may determine a film's generic status resident in the film? An affirmative answer would seem to be supported by asking an average film-goer to identify *High Noon*, or *The Curse of the*



3 WESTERN "AMERICANS" EVERY WEEK

A CHEERFUL MESSAGE TO THE INDEPENDENT EXHIBITOR: GOOD "WESTERNS" INVARIABLY "PULL" AT THE BOX-OFFICE—YOU KNOW THAT'S TRUE IF YOU EVER NEGLECTED YOUR WEEKLY ALLOTMENT OF "WESTERNS"—AMERICAN "WESTERNS." REMEMBER—NO PROGRAM OF THREE OR MORE PICTURES IS COMPLETE WITHOUT AN OUT-OF-DOORS WESTERN—AND, THAT BEING THE CASE SEE THAT YOU GET THE BEST—AND "BEST" IS JUST ANOTHER WAY OF SPELLING "AMERICAN."

"It Pays To Wait"

(Release Monday, July 29, 1912.)

A Smashing, Rollicking Good Western Comedy illustrating that old wag Natural Situations backed by side-splitting pantomime and superfine photography. A picture, clean, healthy and simply overflowing with good nature from

"The Fight At The Mill"

(Release Wednesday, July 31, 1912.)

A powerful Western drama [illegible] Western [illegible] stunning beauty [illegible] ing Indian battle that will interest [illegible]

"A Life For A Kiss"

(Release Thursday, August 1, 1912.)

A magnificent subject telling a pretty [illegible] fighting Western [illegible] gun play [illegible] splendid stock [illegible] will make [illegible]

"The BATTLE-GROUND"

(Regular Release Monday, August 12.) TWO REELS.

An Emotional Masterpiece—A second "Camille" or Madam X [illegible] scenes. A two-reel Feature of absorbing beauty. Intertwining Scenes [illegible] of great Mother Church with the Life of the Gutter in the slum districts [illegible] its Love Play, dealing with the great emotions of the Human Heart. Real [illegible] full of [illegible]

"THE FALL OF BLACKHAWK"

(That Monster TWO-REEL HISTORICAL with Abraham Lincoln, Jefferson Davis, Zachary Taylor, and General Winfield Scott the central characters) is meeting with the Big success we predicted. A few States unsold, offering a splendid opportunity to Live State Rights Buyers.

American Film Mfg. Co. FIFTH FLOOR, ASHLAND BLOCK : : CHICAGO

FILM SUPPLY CO. OF AMERICA

Fig. 18 Advertisement from *The Moving Picture World*, 27 July, 1912. (Adapted from Neale 1990: 53)

Fig. 19 Poster for *Custer's Last Fight.* (Adapted from Everson 1969: 34)

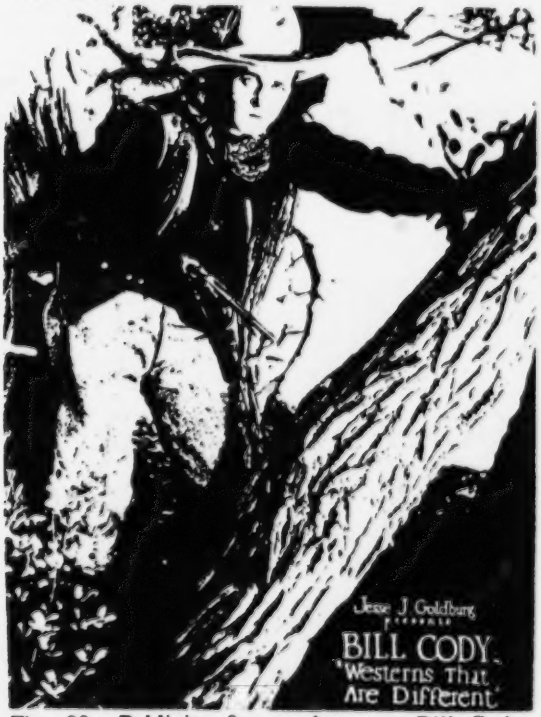


Fig. 20 Publicity for cowboy star Bill Cody. (Adapted from Barbour 1971: 5)

Fig. 21 Poster for *Powdersmoke Range*. (Adapted from Barbour 1971: 102)

Mummy. But if this is so, how is one to account for a characterization of *Star Wars* as a myth, a saga, or as an Arthurian legend, or as a coming-of-age story,[1] or of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* as, variously, a "cubist" film,[2] a German Expressionist film, and a Horror film[3]; or, perhaps more counter-intuitively, of *Angels With Dirty Faces*, the Astaire-Rogers

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[1] *Star Wars* has been quite amenable to analysis according to the mobilisation of generic criteria from outside the traditional notion of Science Fiction films, as well as specifically extra-cinematic criteria. See, for example, Marilyn R. Sherman's account of the mythical aspects of the film in her essay "*Star Wars*: New Worlds and Ancient Myths" (1979). D.F. Melia has characterised the film as "The Saga of Luke Skywalker" (1980), and Denis Wood refers to the traditions of the *Bildungsroman* in his "Growing Up Among the Stars" (1978).

[2] In a review of the film from the March 20, 1921 edition of the *New York Times*, the film is described as "A Cubistic Shocker," and is interpreted explicitly according to reference to its participation in various contemporary art movements, as well as its relationship to the narrative patterns of traditional Hollywood cinema and the specific generic criteria of the Horror cinema.

[3] For an exhaustive account of the changing critical and interpretive fortunes of *Caligari*, see Mike Budd's anthology *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari: Texts, Contexts, Histories* (1990), especially his lengthy introductory essay, "The Moments of Caligari."

musical *Swing Time*, and Frank Capra's *It Happened One Night* as "disguised Western."[1] Traditional approaches to genre are unable to provide a ready answer to such mobility. What is missing is a recognition of the pragmatic nature of such exigencies, a pragmatism that would place *Caligari* within a variety of categories depending on the specific discursive needs that are being satisfied. A thorough consideration of genre would place it within an institutional context, one delimited by careful historical study. At the same time, however, such an institutional history would seek not to finally determine the nature of genres, but would place the concept within the variety of ordering principles that have governed considerations of the cinema. While recognising, then, the undeniable importance of the structures of similarity that have been established in Hollywood cinema, I suggest that the notion of genre, as it has been adopted from literary studies, is insufficient for a rigorous analysis of the consequences of such structurings. The specific shortcomings will be considered, in Chapter 2, according to a rather close analysis of three significant and influential — and in many ways exemplary — theories of film genre.

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[1] See Robert Ray's *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1980* (1985), specifically his chapter "Real and Disguised Westerns."

Chapter 2

> [T]he energy or explanatory power of. . .all theoretical conflicts, is self-exhausting. The more they are used to explain, the more we "see through" them to a yet deeper conflict, which seems to ground or explain all others — that between theory and practice.
>
> Adena Rosmarin
> *The Power of Genre*[1]

I Genre Criticism/Film Genre

The literature on film genre is vast and expanding. Exhaustive chronicles of the Western, of the film noir, of the Gangster film, the Musical, the Melodrama, etc., continue to be published at a steady pace. Individual studies of specific film genres, of the social function of the Horror film, for example, or of the Comedy or Detective film, often reasserting the terms of prior ideological analyses, are regularly produced. Each typically offers its version of the genre's history, often adding a potentially controversial revision of past tellings in order to mark it as substantially "new," as well as an often revised list of films that comprise the genre. The list may be quite neutral and therefore as exhaustive as possible (every Western ever made), or it may be elaborated according to certain normative criteria (the most fully articulated, or mature, gangster films, or only "classic" film noir). While serving to separate the latest work on a genre from its predecessors, such alterations are essentially superficial, rearranging the elements upon a homogeneous field, perhaps adding a few films and removing a few others, but not substantially reconsidering the terms of genre analysis.

Despite the voluminous productions of genre *critics*, there is a relatively limited amount of rigorous genre *theory*, although its influence is immense. For the most part, genre criticism has proceeded according to implicit theoretical assumptions. The genre critic may preface his or her work with a perfunctory theoretical statement, typically aligning the project with a specific theoretical position, yet most perform their critical and interpretive activity without having elaborated an explicit model of film genre. For most

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[1] Rosmarin 1985, p. 3.

critics, the task is understood to be the description of an individual genre, on the basis of which larger conclusions regarding, typically, social, political or ideological issues, may be drawn. A number of films are isolated, understood to belong to a specific genre, and are analysed according to such membership. While the interpretations generated may differ, the films chosen, and the genres to which they are understood to belong, are surprisingly stable. As a result of such stability, genre critics rarely feel obliged to posit an explicit theoretical model of genre, understanding the categories to be fixed and basically closed. Their task is to assess the films that have traditionally been understood to belong to such categories rather than to investigate the categories' constitutions, or the terms of their elaboration.

Having said this, however, it must be said that various significant theories of film genre have indeed been offered in order to provide a framework within which to contain such histories and lists. The theoretical paradigm that has had the most direct influence on film genre theory is continental structuralism. While the notion of the study of film genre has been understood to have been initiated with seminal essays by Robert Warshow and André Bazin,[1] the initiation of film genre *theory* has been traced to efforts of the critics of the *Cahiers du cinema* and *Positif*, who had produced analyses of American film, specifically the Western, in terms of their status as social myths. Similar approaches were being applied at about the same time by scholars associated with the British Film Institute (BFI), most notably by Alan Lovell. On the basis of such work, the strategy of isolating recurrent thematic and formal elements in films, and describing such elements in terms of their social and ideological functions, became the dominant approach in the burgeoning field of film genre studies. The first comprehensive statements, at least in English, of a structuralist genre theory are Peter Wollen's *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, Jim Kitses' analysis of the Western, *Horizons West*, and Will Wright's *Sixguns and Society: A Structuralist Study of the Western*..[2]

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[1] Robert Warshow, in his 1948 essay "The Gangster as Tragic Hero," provided key terms that would inform later considerations of the "Gangster" film, while André Bazin, in his companion essays "The Western, or the American Film *par excellence*," and "The Evolution of the Western," offered, as the latter essay's title indicates, a significant developmental metaphor that continues to function in considerations of the Western. Both of Bazin's essays are anthologised in *What is Cinema?* (1967) Vol. II, pp. 140-57. Warshow's essay appeared originally in *Partisan Review*, but has been reprinted in his collection *The Immediate Experience*(1970), pp. 127-33.

[2] David Bordwell, in his book *Making Meaning*, has carefully considered the terms with which structuralist notions have been employed in film genre studies. As Bordwell goes to some pains to point out, the application by film genre theorists, and film theorists generally, of structuralist concepts to the analysis of the cinema was, at best, superficial. Notions of deep structure, of structural antinomies and binary

Of the various theoretical models that have been elaborated, however, at least three stand out as significant and influential, each of which bears to various degrees the structuralist legacy. Thomas Schatz's work is perhaps the most often cited, and has provided the terms for a considerable number of subsequent analyses. Rick Altman has offered a penetrating critique of the field, and has attempted to fill the theoretical gaps, so to speak, that have been maintained in film genre studies. Steve Neale has provided one of the most sophisticated theoretical accounts of genre, published in the early eighties, based mainly on a post-*Screen* psychoanalytic model. He has since reconsidered his own position and has offered some suggestions for the future direction of film genre studies, mainly according to a more comprehensive historical account of genre. While there are significant differences in the three approaches, it is here that common ground may be discovered. In the case of each, there is a recognition that in order to provide a complete account of the structures and the structural operations of genre the significance of diachrony must be considered. Nevertheless, each remains bound by reified notions of genre which are simply placed into the flow of time. In Schatz's case, genre is understood to be subject to evolutionary forces, what he calls "patterns of increasing self-consciousness," as both filmmakers and audiences become more and more familiar with a genre's "grammar." Rick Altman explains the success of certain genres at the expense of others according to the syntactical durability of those genres as opposed to the semantic variability of weaker genres, the relationship of the two aspects understood as the point of contestation between the audience's ritual use of genre and Hollywood's ideological strategies. Steve Neale, having reconsidered the hypostatizing results of his initial psychoanalytic model, has, by recourse to institutional and journalistic discourse, reconceived of genre as *process*, employing the terms of the historical model of literary development proposed by the

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oppositions, functioned mainly to produce rather straightforward thematic interpretations of specific films or of whole genres. Employed as interpretive templates, so to speak, structuralist notions and techniques provided the film analyst with the means to order the thematic content of a film into some meaningful pattern in order to effect a compelling interpretation. Thematic elements would typically be separated into categories of opposition, generating the means with which an interpretation would be rendered. Such strategies were undertaken most successfully in considerations of the Western, where the opposition between Nature and Culture could be readily identified. On the basis of such thematic patterning, argues Bordwell, broader observations become available to the analyst. Peter Wollen, for example, in his analyses of the Westerns of John Ford, "derives Ford's master antinomy from Henry Nash Smith's *Virgin Land*, wherein the desert/garden contrast is shown to be, in Wollen's words, 'one which has dominated American thought and literature, recurring in countless novels, tracts, political speeches and magazine stories.' By treating the auteur's themes as myths, the critic opens up the work to a new kind of interpretation, in which the "Ford film" may be seen as a *symptomatic* expression of cultural ideology" (80). Structuralist techniques, then, function more as rhetorical strategies than as tools of scientific analysis.

Russian Formalists. In the case of all three, genre, whether conceived of as a system, as a site of negotiation, or as a process, continues to be understood as an entity, the constitution of which may alter over time, but which, nevertheless, possesses a material form, and is thus amenable to a fundamentally immanent analysis.

II The Theory of Film Genre

Thomas Schatz: Film Genre and Film Genres

Published in 1981, Thomas Schatz's *Hollywood Genres* has been influential as an introductory text to the field of film genre studies. Reviewed and cited widely, Schatz's work has provided key terms for genre study in the last decade, according specifically to his explanation of the process of development undergone by genres, which are seen to move from an initial "realism," to a more conventional and self-contained "classical" stage, to an eventual self-conscious "formalism," once the genre's conventionality becomes obvious and familiar to filmmakers and audiences alike.[1] Such an evolutionary pattern is quite compelling, and seems to coincide with initial observations of the development of Hollywood cinema. The Western especially can be seen to develop from the early authentic representations of the frontier (representations that are understood to largely coincide with contemporary events) to the more traditional and conventional structures of the 1930s and 1940s with films such as *Stagecoach*, *Dodge City*, *High Noon*, etc. As the figure of the lone cowboy, sporting a white hat and dueling with his adversary on Main Street in order to assert the primacy of the community over the lawless individual, becomes increasingly familiar and cliché, he is replaced, occasionally in the 1950s, and comprehensively in the 1960s and 1970s, with a far more psychologically complex and ambiguous central figure. As a vehicle for the transmission of social values, the genre becomes exhausted, and its emphasis shifts to more specifically aesthetic or formal concerns, providing the filmmaker

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[1] Schatz's is not the first evolutionary model elaborated for the study of film genre. We have, for instance, noted the work of André Bazin. Will Wright, too, has proposed a similar pattern of development for the Western. Schatz's influence is due mainly to the synthetic nature of his work, in so far as it is a restatement of and extrapolation on earlier approaches to the question of genre, in its provision a global model for genre rather than an accounting of the development of a specific genre, and in its rather straightforward reference to and application of concepts derived from continental structuralism, concepts which, at the time of publication, were gaining a certain currency in the North American academic context. It is, as well, an attractive model pedagogically, and Schatz has assumed a certain stable position in film studies curricula

with the opportunity to manipulate the conventional structure and for the audience to enjoy the pleasure of recognising such manipulations.

Schatz effects such an explanation according to his characterization of genre as a *system*, more specifically, as a "coherent, value-laden narrative system" (16). As such, it is capable of being analysed "in terms of its fundamental structural components: plot, character, setting, thematics, style, and so on" (16). Such analysis, however, proceeds according to an initial abstraction, following the primary methodological move suggested by structuralism, whereby the individual instances of a genre will be seen to mobilize a certain number of potential elements selected from a static and immutable "master pattern." The concept of the Western exists as an ideal "deep structure," analogous to the Saussurean notion of *langue*, whereas the individual film is understood as the generic *parole*, which, through close observation, provides the analyst with glimpses of the basic structure of the genre. Schatz insists on the maintenance of "a distinction between the *film genre* and the *genre film*. Whereas the genre exists as a sort of tacit 'contract' between filmmakers and audience, the genre film is an actual event that honors such a contract. To discuss the Western genre is to address neither a single Western film nor even all Westerns, but rather that system of conventions which identifies Western films as such" (16).

It is precisely the deep structural system of conventions that is the true object for the genre analyst, according to which the individual film may be judged to either conform or resist. Whatever differences may pertain between *Stagecoach*, a paradigmatically "classical" Western, and *The Wild Bunch*, which functions critically and reflexively, each participates in the basic structural concerns of the Western. While the fundamental structure remains the same, as impervious to the pressures of local and individual usage as the basic grammatical structure of language, nevertheless the specific unique utterances (the genre films) may be seen to change over time as the terms of the relationship to the basic structure are altered. As such, Schatz is able to describe film genre as both static and dynamic.

> On the one hand, it is a familiar formula of interrelated narrative and cinematic components that serves to continually reexamine some basic cultural conflict: one could argue, for example, that all Westerns confront the same fundamental issues (the taming of the frontier, the celebration of the hero's rugged individualism, the hero's conflict with the frontier community, etc.) in elaborating America's foundation ritual and that slight formal variations do not alter those static thematic characteristics. On the other hand, changes in cultural attitudes, new influential genre films, the economics of the industry, and so forth, continually refine any film genre. As such, its nature is constantly evolving. For example, the evolution of Western heroes from agents of law and order to renegade outlaws or professional killers reflects a genuine

> change in the genre. One could even say that the term "Western" means something different today from what it did two or three decades ago. (16)

Such a model is quite powerful when applied, for example, to a film such as *Dances With Wolves*, which stands so apparently at odds with the traditional structures of Westerns, yet which shares equally apparent affinities. Whereas traditionally the Indian has functioned negatively in Western films, as the opposite to the white settlers' values of order and civilization, and has therefore been represented as an obstacle to be legitimately overcome, in *Dances With Wolves*, such legitimacy is questioned as the values of the Indians are elevated over those of the settlers. While the roles of each have been reversed, however, the semantic qualities are maintained. The settlers are still identified with civilization, and the Indians with nature, the conflict between which persists as the central narrative mechanism. The relative values, however, have been transposed, so that nature functions as good, while civilization, imposed by the encroaching settlers upon the Indians, is bad. With the application of Schatz's model, such a transposition may be explained by the cultural and social changes that have taken place in the last decade or so, specifically in terms of an increased awareness of environmental issues, which is translated in the film in terms of a valorization of the Indians' essentially interdependent relationship with nature as opposed to the settlers' (represented by their advance guard, the U.S. Cavalry) indifference to and exploitation of nature.[1] The taming of the frontier, identified by Schatz as a fundamental issue confronted and negotiated by the Western, is maintained in the film, although its treatment conforms to contemporary concerns about the rapid depletion of natural resources and the general deterioration of the environment which, in a direct way, is the legacy of nineteenth-century American expansionism.

Despite differences, then, in the surface manifestations of the issue in *Dances With Wolves*, the film can still be seen to participate in the genre's basic conventional system which posits a difference between, and clash of, nature and culture. Its resolution, however, distinguishes it from previous mobilizations which have traditionally championed the civilizing project of the settlers at the expense of the Indians. On the basis of the Western's fundamental pattern, the director of *Dances With Wolves* is able to effect a critique of such a project by self-consciously manipulating that pattern. The effect of the critique is registered with audiences according to their basic generic knowledge of the Western which allows them to experience the significance of the transposition (perhaps not

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[1] I owe this interpretation to a discussion with Martin Lefebvre.

consciously, but at least intuitively). It is here that Schatz discovers the specific mechanism of change, namely in the shifting terms of the contract between filmmaker and audience, and the term 'contract,' which had been employed metaphorically, now functions literally. Schatz's begins by reasserting the crucial, if often overlooked, fact that the cinema, in the final analysis, is a business, and that its main objective is to produce and market a specific commodity. From its earliest years, producers have expended considerable energy on the packaging of that commodity, establishing strategies to attract the consumer, and to appeal to as wide a market-base as possible.

The zenith of such strategies can be seen in the Hollywood studio system, the "genius" of which Schatz explains as the key to the rapid and comprehensive domination of the American cinema.[1] It was during the studio era that the main strategies of commodification were perfected. Narrative, stylistic and thematic conventions were firmly established, providing filmmakers with ready templates, and audiences with familiar patterns. The main genres were well into their "classical" stages, and the Hollywood cinema had assumed its familiar contours. This process of development, according to Schatz, was animated by a continuing "dialogue" between the industry and its audience. "In their continual efforts to reach as massive an audience as possible," writes Schatz, "early filmmakers investigated areas of potential audience appeal and, at the same time, standardized those areas whose appeal already had been verified by audience response" (4). By the 1930s, on the basis of such early efforts, Hollywood production had become heavily regimented, and was able, according to the establishment of firm regimes of conventionality, to produce and effectively market a consistently profitable product — the genre film.

Crucial in the elaboration and solidification of such conventions was the response of the audience, which would register its approval or disapproval of a particular pattern, or of the various alterations to a pattern, through the box office. Paying close attention to the receipts, the industry would modify its product, fine-tuning it according to its interpretation of the audiences' response, while maintaining the initial basic structure that had proved so successful at the outset. This would explain the pattern of repetition and difference so apparent in genre films. While the early years were spent establishing the genres' fundamental structure, in the studio era and subsequent years various subtle alterations were effected, maintaining the initially successful pattern while altering the specific

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[1] For a thorough analysis of the success of the American cinema see Thomas Schatz, *The Genius of the System: Filmmaking in the Studio Era* (1988).

manifestations in accord with changing audience desires and expectations. Schatz stresses the basically practical nature of a mass business enterprise, which invests huge amounts of capital in a standardized product yet must maintain continued interest from the consumer. A dilemma, then, exists at the heart of such an enterprise: "on the one hand, their product must be sufficiently inventive to attract attention and satisfy the audience's demand for novelty, and on the other hand, they must protect their initial investment by relying to some extent upon established conventions that have been proven through previous exposure and repetition" (5).

The solution to the dilemma lay in the standardized practices and complete vertical integration of the studio system, which was capable of factory production and which possessed a direct link to the audience. Schatz explains:

> The built-in "feedback" circuits of the Hollywood system ensured this repetition of successful stories and techniques, because the studio's production-distribution-exhibition system enabled filmmakers to gauge their work against audience response. It is as if with each commercial effort, the studios suggested another variation on cinematic conventions, and the audience indicated whether the inventive variations would themselves be conventionalised through their repeated usage. (5)

While the studios' monopolies were eventually contested and dismantled, nevertheless, Schatz argues, by this time, "Hollywood had read the pulse of its popular audience in developing an engaging and profitable means of narrative cinematic expression — the conventions of feature filmmaking were firmly established" (5). The terms of genre filmmaking had, in fact, been so successfully established that the patterns had been transported to other national cinemas, altered according to particular indigenous pressures — the Western influenced Akira Kurosawa's Samurai films, the Hardboiled Detective film provided terms of critical, avant-garde French filmmaking strategies, etc. — and, despite the disintegration of the studio system, genre films continue to be produced according to the basic structural patterns and are still subject to the pressures of changing audience preferences.[1]

While there is much to recommend, then, in Schatz's account, there are nevertheless significant difficulties with his position. Perhaps most notably, he has essentialised the core elements of genres, rendering them in transhistorical and immutable

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[1] While the industry is no longer integrated vertically, so that today independent productions are simply distributed by the studios, the legacy of the studio era's links is still such that, in Schatz's argument, the "feedback" is still capable of being monitored.

terms. As such, they are capable of registering historical change only according to the specific choices made by the filmmaker in the arrangement of such elements, such choices determined by gauging the response of audiences. As an explanatory tool there is a certain undeniable power to his model, yet there is a sense in which it has been elaborated according to a rather selective use of historical data, and the model's constitution, instead of being understood as Schatz's heuristic fabrication, is presented as an observed phenomenon. The progression from classical conventionality and opacity to a reflexive transparency, presented by Schatz as a natural evolutionary process, is supported by a selection of examples that conform to the preestablished telos, and by the exclusion of aberrant examples that do not comfortably fit the schema. Alan Williams has made a similar observation, accusing Schatz of elaborating an ersatz history, "ersatz in its method (synchronic reduction tempered by diachronic 'influences') and in its object of study (an arbitrary list of films)" (1984: 124). The integrity of his account of the evolution of genre is undermined by even a cursory look at the variety and disparity of actual Hollywood production, as Williams easily demonstrates by noting the "pseudo-historical scheme" imposed by Schatz on film genre production, whereby the films chosen by Schatz as examples are so without any objective criteria. Why this film over another, asks Williams, answering that the choices serve merely to support the hypothesis, rather than as the material upon which to base a conclusion. As a result, there are rather obvious gaps in Schatz's history. As Williams notes: "One can find self-conscious Westerns, such as Fairbanks' *Wild and Woolly*, as early as the late teens. In fact, the entire mid- to late-silent cinema seems remarkably "formalistic," which is possibly one reason it is wholly absent from Schatz's book" (123-4). The difficulties of such an "evolutionary" model, and the fact of the presence of apparently self-reflexive films from the earliest years of the cinema, is also presented in Tag Gallagher's essay, "Shoot-Out at the Genre Corral: Problems in the 'Evolution of the Western." Gallagher is considerably less forgiving than Williams in his characterisation of the evolutionists' methodological chicanery. "Every argument that evolution exists at all," argues Gallagher, "comes down not to evidence mustered through representative sampling but either to bald assertions or to invidious comparisons between a couple of titles — a 'classic' Western versus a 'self-conscious' Western — selected specifically to illustrate the assertion" (203-4).[1]

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[1] Gallagher's critique is scathing, according mainly to the ease with which he is able to marshal evidence against evolutionary models, noting that, if one were to simply consider the vast number of westerns made *before* 1915, there was, very early in the cinema's history, a "hyperconsciousness of the genre" (205). Even

As a result of such selection, Schatz is able to effect an ideal model of film genre, the existence of which is unthreatened by the aberrations, which are passed over without comment. At the most basic level, then, it is an unreliable model, which fails to account effectively for the ebb and flow of various approaches and styles — indeed, by insisting upon an evolutionary representation of the history of genre film, Schatz's model effaces the actual heterogeneity of such history, presenting it rather as a series of autonomous moments, each consisting of an identifiable and independent approach to the generic material. The straightforward teleology of Schatz's account, its simplicity and naïveté, has determined its function, for subsequent theorists, as an exemplum for how not to approach the question of the historical variability of genre.

In addition to Schatz's oversimplification of history, there is the problem of the rather straightforward account he provides of the circuitry of feedback in his implicitly rendered model of communication. As such a feedback circuit, Schatz's model is indebted to a large (but unacknowledged) degree to traditional models of communication, specifically those that insist upon a process more complex than that suggested by a straightforward, one-way, linear transmission of information (the most commonly cited example being that described by information theorists Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver). More complex models of communication, extrapolated primarily from Saussure's model of the circuit of speech, understand information to be exchanged between two parties, each of whom have recourse to, in the words of Werner Meyer-Eppler (1969), who has expanded the elements of Shannon and Weaver's model, individual "sign repertoires," from which the material for communication is selected, each repertoire understood to overlap to a certain degree with the other. The notion of feedback has been incorporated specifically into a model of communication by Paul Watzlawick, et al. (1967),

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by 1903 there is specific textual evidence of a generic self-consciousness, when, in Edwin Porter's *The Great Train Robbery*, the audience is presented with an extra-diegetic preface, so to speak, wherein an outlaw figure, in a medium shot and framed against a plain black background, fires directly at the audience. On the basis of such observations, Gallagher's call, essentially, is for a return to the championing of the aesthetic aspects of cinema, so that older films may be considered in all their complexity and ambiguity — which is precisely what they have been expunged of by the evolutionists, according to their model's (implicit) insistence on the "naïveté" of early films. In the elaboration of his critique, however, Gallagher dismisses the aspect of genre criticism that this thesis is specifically concerned with, namely the genre critic's pragmatic activity of classification, which he presents in quite disparaging terms, as somehow solipsistic. "A film is considered 'classic,' he insists, "when it matches a critic's paradigm of the ideal western. But the paradigm is entirely arbitrary, with the result that there is some disagreement about which pictures are 'classic' and which have evolved astray" (204). While Gallagher's historical insights are a very useful tonic, his dismissal is of precisely the activity I will be arguing always necessarily premises a generic argument, and which, as such, needs to be incorporated into any potentially exhaustive account of the functionality of genre. These issues will be pursued in more detail later.

as well as others, transforming the traditional linear pattern of information transmission into a circular one (See Fig. 27, in Appendix II).[1] Schatz considers none of the complexities of such models in his mobilisation of the concept of feedback, which functions simply as a mechanism of correction in the elaboration of a mutually satisfactory progress of alteration As the social and cultural preoccupations of the audience change, and as their regimes of generic knowledge expand and become increasingly sophisticated, these are unproblematically transmitted (the box-office functioning, apparently, as the channel of transmission) to the filmmakers who register such developments and refashion subsequent generic expressions accordingly. Indeed, it is only on the basis of such a simplistic notion of communication that Schatz may in fact elaborate his ersatz history.

Even with the explicit incorporation of the various components of circular communication models, however, there is still a too simple pattern of information transmission and correction that belies the actual complexity of such communicative situations, which I may characterise initially here as cultural dialogues. While such circularity necessarily suggests the more pragmatic aspects of communication, it suffers from certain difficulties and limitations that will be considered specifically in Chapter 3, according to the introduction of a more elaborate dialogical model. We may, however, at this point, consider a subsequent attempt, by Rick Altman, to render explicit the terms of correction only implied by Schatz's model, and to account for them with rather more subtlety. Altman's efforts, however, as we shall see, are similarly based upon notions of rather unproblematic communication.

Rick Altman and the Semantic/Syntactic Approach

Rick Altman has in the last decade produced significant works in both the theory of genre and in the critical application of such theory. Altman's central theoretical text is his essay "A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre,"[2] which serves as the basis for his subsequent work on, specifically, the American film musical.[3] Altman is, in his efforts to outline a "semantic/syntactic approach," concerned to remedy what he sees as a distinct lack of rigour in film genre studies, a lack that has produced a significant and troubling critical

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[1] A useful summary of the variety of, and issues around, the elaboration of communication models is provided by Winfried Nöth in his *Handbook of Semiotics* (1990).

[2] Published originally in *Cinema Journal*, 23 (3), Spring 1984: 6-18, the essay has been reprinted, in a slightly altered form, in Barry Keith Grant, ed., *Film Genre Reader* (1985).

[3] See Rick Altman 1981, 1989.

and terminological uncertainty. This shortcoming is understood to be a result of a typically American resistance to theory in general. Altman contrasts the "can do" tradition of American intellectuals with the more systematic approach of continental theorists, specifically of the French. "Whereas the French clearly view theory as a first principle," he argues, "we Americans tend to see it as a last resort, something to turn to when all else fails" (26). Genre criticism has proceeded, as a result, with little reflection, according mainly to the apparent simplicity of the Hollywood cinema itself. Why make an effort to theoretically designate the object of study, when that object is so (apparently) immediately identifiable? After all, he suggests, "[w]e all know a genre when we see one" (26). Theoretical support, then, in the face of such simplicity, is only a secondary consideration, used to paper over the gaps that appear in an unreflective critical project.

Such pragmatism, as he calls it, whereby the critic follows the path of least resistance in determining what will be studied, invariably generates a number of contradictions which effectively undermine the critic's very activity.[1] Where critics have had recourse to theory, it has been *ad hoc*, and used to support their original intuitive gestures, rather than providing the premises upon which a critical project may be securely based. Within an intuitive genre criticism, fundamental oppositions have operated that have effectively prevented the reconciliation of the basically dynamic, and, in Altman's terms, "bivalent," constitution of genres. Such oppositions are based upon the failure to adequately account for the manner in which a genre, as a semantic category, develops a successful syntax over time.

As a result of the failure by genre critics to recognise and account for the irreducible relationship between the semantic and syntactic elements of genre, they have been required to choose one aspect at the expense of the other. The critic has either elaborated an exhaustive list of films by identifying all those that contain pertinent semantic elements, or has generated an exclusive selection of those "classic" films that conform to the most successful syntactic structure. The former strategy is based upon such tautological premises as, for example, a Western is a film that takes place in a western setting, or a musical is a film with musical numbers. Such equations allow for the inclusion of any film that employs at least some semantic elements contained within the rubric "western setting,"

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[1] This is not an isolated example of such derisory (mis)characterisation of the term pragmatism. David Bordwell, in his diagnosis of the malaise of contemporary interpretive practices, similarly condemns the "pragmatic" activity of the interpreter and, like Altman, calls for an increased rigour in response to the imprecision and carelessness of the pragmatists. See Bordwell 1989.

or "musical number," etc. The latter strategy, on the other hand, limits its corpus to those films that employ what are understood as the most successful syntactic structures, such structures developing to a point of maturity and perfection over time.

As opposed to the exhaustiveness and broad applicability of the semantic approach, the syntactic model possesses a certain explanatory power. The problem, however, is that the two have been maintained as separate and exclusive approaches. The critic limited to semantic criteria has been able merely to generate lists, whereas the syntactic critic, while capable of explaining the meaning of the genre understood to be borne upon the genre's structural arrangement, is unable to explain those films that share semantic markers, but diverge syntactically.[1]

The question of development has been equally stymied by the enforced separation of the semantic and the syntactic. While the tautologically derived catalogues are premised specifically upon the existence of an a-historic category, which will provide the means with which one may determine the membership of specific films, syntactic approaches have also necessarily implied similarly static and ideal, or "Platonic," categories, seen as the point of culmination to be reached in a genre's evolution. In both cases, for Altman, the question of the diachronic aspect of genre has been dealt with inadequately. He accuses genre critics of disguising the results of the application of their a-historical schema to essentially temporal forms. Altman explains:

> Now, quite obviously, no major genre remains unchanged over the many decades of its existence. In order to mask the scandal of applying synchronic analysis to an evolving form, critics have been extremely clever in their creation of categories designed to negate the notion of change and to imply the perpetual self-identity of each genre. Western and horror films are often referred to as "classic," the musical is defined in terms of the so-called "Platonic ideal" of integration, the critical corpus of the melodrama has largely been restricted to the postwar efforts of Sirk and

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[1] This has often led to embarrassing gaps in the various generic schemes critic's have sought to elaborate. Will Wright, for example, in his study of the Western *Six Guns and Society* (1975), identifies four basic plot structures: the Classical Plot, the Transition Theme, the Vengeance Variation, and the Professional Plot. He then lists the top-grossing westerns between 1931 and 1972, characterising each according to the syntactic criteria of the four plots. While most are accounted for by such criteria, several films in the list are left uncharacterised, troublesome exceptions to basic patterns, and incapable of generating a fifth plot owing to their specific idiosyncrasies. Altman also notes the so-called "Pennsylvania western" such as *High, Wide and Handsome* (Rouben Mamoulian, 1937), *Drums Along the Mohawk* (John Ford, 1939) and *Unconquered* (Cecile B. DeMille, 1949), which "have definite affinities with the western. Employing familiar characters set in relationships similar to their counterparts west of the Mississippi, these films construct plots and develop a frontier structure clearly derived from decades of western novels and films. But they do it in Pennsylvania, and in the wrong century. Are these films westerns because they share the syntax of hundreds of films we call westerns? Or are they not westerns because they don't fit [Jean] Mitry's [semantically generated] definition?" (31).

> Minnelli, and so on. Lacking a workable hypothesis regarding the historical dimension of generic syntax, we have insulated that syntax, along with the genre theory that studies it, from the flow of time. (34)

Despite the anti-Platonic rhetoric of this passage, Altman himself seems in his essay to be pursuing a similar ground upon which to base his notion of genre and of genres, while at the same time, however, providing a compelling explanation for the changing constitutions of genres. The descriptive role Altman assigns to theory is announced explicitly in the questions that initiate the essay: "What is a genre? Which films are genre films?" (26) Against the impressionistic approach of most genre criticism, and in order to avoid the resulting contradictions, Altman endeavours to elaborate the means with which such fundamental questions may be answered satisfactorily, while he is also concerned to trace the historical route a genre proceeds upon as it assumes its stability, as it successfully incorporates its semantic material into a firm syntactical structure.

Altman attempts to describe more accurately than Schatz the precise mechanism of change, the source of genre's dynamism and of its drive to stability and durability, and it is precisely at the nexus of the semantic and the syntactic aspects of genre that he discovers such a source, understood as the site of negotiation between the mainstream cinema and its audience. For Altman, Schatz's emphasis is too heavily on the side of reception, on the audience, who register their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the terms of a particular genre, with the ability of a genre to provide the appropriate ritual function. Genre is understood in such an account in loose Lévi-Straussian terms as popular myth. Summarising such a ritual approach to genre, Altman explains that, "[f]ar from being limited to mere entertainment, filmgoing offers a satisfaction more akin to that associated with established religion" (29). The audience's response to particular films is then based upon the film's power to provide such satisfaction.[1] As Altman explains, paraphrasing Schatz's argument rather concisely, "[b]y choosing the films it would patronize, the audience revealed its preferences and its beliefs, thus inducing Hollywood studios to produce films reflecting its desires" (29).

In contrast to the ritual approach — or, as Altman would have it, in distinct opposition — is the ideological explanation of genre, which, in rather more cynical terms, understands genre cinema to provide the film industry with the means to inculcate in

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[1] Altman includes in the ritual school of genre, in addition to Schatz, John Cawelti, Leo Braudy, Frank McConnell, Michael Wood and Will Wright.

audiences its specific ideological outlook.[1] As an industry, and as a community composed of individuals who share interests with and/or are members of the business and political elite, Hollywood cinema, through its movies, would seek to communicate such interests in as effective, and as profitable, a manner as possible. Altman offers a rough characterisation of the ideological approach to genre:

> Simplifying a bit, we might say that it characterizes each individual genre as a specific type of lie, an untruth whose most characteristic feature is its ability to masquerade as truth. Whereas the ritual approach sees Hollywood as responding to societal pressure and thus expressing audience desires, the ideological approach claims that Hollywood takes advantage of spectator energy and psychic investment in order to lure the audience into Hollywood's own positions. The two are irreducibly opposed, yet these irreconcilable arguments continue to represent the most interesting and well defended of recent approaches to Hollywood genre film. (29)

Altman's goal, then, is to provide the terms for a reconciliation, pursuing the positive aspects of each approach, while endeavouring to combine the two in order to fashion a more complete account of the development of genres, as well as the motive force of such development. Each of the approaches, while they have much to say individually about genre, fail to account for this very fact, which in itself suggests, Altman implies, that a reconciliation is in order, that the irreducibility of the two positions is a result of the refusal of each to see the power of the other's argument. Altman says as much when, according to his diagnosis, he offers his prescription: "We find ourselves desperately in need of a theory which, without dismissing any of these widely held positions, would explain the circumstances underlying their existence, thus paving the way for a critical methodology that encompasses and indeed thrives on their inherent contradictions" (30).[2]

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[1] As an exemplary instance of the ideological approach, Altman offers the essay "*Young Lincoln* de John Ford," written collectively, in 1970, by the editorial board of the *Cahiers du Cinéma*, as well as Jean-Louis Comolli's series of articles in the *Cahiers*, presented in six parts as "Technique et ideologie." In English, the main forum for ideological analyses was the journal *Screen*. Premised specifically upon Althusserean notions of ideology, and manifested, for instance, in the work of Stephen Heath, the "*Screen* project," as Altman calls it, is summarised by Philip Rosen in his essay "*Screen* and the Marxist Project in Film Criticism," and its key texts anthologised in his *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader* (1986).

[2] Altman practically undermines his entire argument here, however, by characterising the situation as fundamentally contradictory, rather than as based on a merely illusory contradiction. Rather than explicitly presenting it thus, and proposing clearly to solve the contradiction, he has recourse instead to rather loosely rendered notions of poststructuralism, arguing that "[i]f we have learned anything from poststructuralist criticism, we have learned not to fear logical contradictions but instead to respect the extraordinary energy generated by the play of contradictory forces within a field. What we need now is a new critical strategy enabling us simultaneously to understand and to capitalize on the tensions existing in current generic criticism" (30). This is Altman's only reference to poststructuralist strategies in the elaboration of his

In either case, for Altman, constitutive power is unduly accorded to either one or the other of the two interested parties, to a cynical and mendacious film industry, or to a powerful audience seeking the means to ritually enact their desires and beliefs, without accounting for the negotiation that such a situation necessarily implies. In its inevitable expression of its own class interests, the film industry will of course produce films that will, on the whole, be aligned with such interests. At the same time, as a profit-making enterprise, the industry will inevitably attempt to gauge the desires of the audience. The push and pull of the ritual with the ideological aspects of genre are played out textually according to the terms of the semantic and the syntactic. Having proposed the formal contours of generic development, suggesting that, "genres arise in one of two fundamental ways: either a relatively stable set of semantic givens is developed through syntactic experimentation into a coherent and durable syntax, or an already existing syntax adopts a new set of semantic elements" (34), Altman argues that such changes are wrought by the force of negotiation as industry and audience confront each other, each seeking to employ generic elements in the service of their own ideological and ritual projects. "[W]hat is it," he asks, "that energizes the transformation of a borrowed semantics into a uniquely Hollywood syntax? Or what justifies the intrusion of a new semantics into a well-defined syntactic situation?" (35). Endeavouring to ground such transformations materially, he answers: "Far from postulating a uniquely internal, formal progression, I would propose that the relationship between the semantic and the syntactic constitutes the very site of negotiation between Hollywood and its audience, and thus between ritual and ideological uses of genre" (35). Altman characterises the terms of the negotiation in more detail, rendering the two approaches, as a result, in rather more complex terms.

> Hollywood does not simply lend its voice to the public's desires, nor does it simply manipulate the audience. On the contrary, most genres go through a period of accommodation during which the public's desires are fitted to Hollywood's priorities (and vice-versa). Because the public doesn't want to know that it is being manipulated, the successful ritual/ideological "fit" is almost always one that disguises Hollywood's potential for manipulation while playing up its capacity for entertainment. (36)

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theory, and it seems to exist in stark opposition to the rather straightforward terms with which he in fact erases the apparent contradictions. While I have other difficulties with Altman's argument, which will be dealt with directly, in this sense there is a certain elegance and economy that he jeopardizes rather unnecessarily by what I may only understand as a perfunctory nod to fashion.

It is here that Altman's account emends but does not effectively transcend Schatz's. Elaborating upon Schatz's simpler feedback model, which for Altman neglected the ideological aspects in favour of the ritual, Altman's has at least pointed at the more dialogic nature of the situation. Based, however, upon fundamentally similar notions of communication, the goal of which is the creation of a stable entity according to a process of communicative exchange, Altman's project at this point returns to the traditional descriptive function of genre theory, leaving aside the functional and pragmatic aspects that are hinted at by his investigation of the activities of the two parties within the communicative situation. The communication between the two is understood as part of an effort to create a genre, which, once completed, will serve their respective requirements equally well, and which may be understood to have reached a certain autonomy. The moment of clearest communication, that is, arrives when each of the parties rests in the contemplation of the object that together they have assembled, when they arrive at what Altman describes as a "common ground." It is at this point, too, that the genre becomes comprehensively available for the critic, according to its new-found stability. The consequences of this characterisation will be considered in more detail shortly. We may, for the moment, simply detail the conclusions Altman is able to offer. "Whenever," he writes, "a lasting fit is obtained — which it is whenever a semantic genre becomes a syntactic one — it is because a common ground has been found, a region where the audience's ritual values coincide with Hollywood's ideological ones" (36). The progress of genres, the process whereby a stable genre may eventually be rendered, is thus understood to consist of the two communicants' eventual agreement, at the point of which development may cease — or at least dramatically slow — according to their having discovered the right mix of ingredients to make up such a mutually satisfying entity. Altman is in a position, as a result, to explain why, for the most part, critics from both sides of the genre camp — the ritualists and the ideologists — agree on the constitution of specific generic canons.

> This general agreement on canon stems, I would claim, from the fundamentally bivalent nature of any relatively stable generic syntax. If it takes a long time to establish a generic syntax and if many seemingly promising formulas or successful films never spawn a genre, it is because only certain types of structure, within a particular semantic environment, are suited to the special bilingualism required of a durable genre. . . . The successful genre owes its success not alone to its reflection of an audience ideal, nor solely to its status as apology for the Hollywood enterprise, but to its ability to carry out both functions simultaneously. (36)

Altman is also able to explain the sorts of confusions that genre analysts have been prone to, as long as they are unable to distinguish between the various moments in a genre's development, and those alternative moments of stability, to see, that is, when a genre may be borrowing, and adapting to its own use, semantic or syntactic elements from other generic regimes. Armed with the appropriate knowledge of such processes, "we are not likely to fall," he explains, invoking a common example of a certain critical faithlessness, "into the trap of equating *Star Wars* (George Lucas, 1977) with the Western (as numerous recent critics have done)" (35), understanding any equivalence to be the result of the science fiction film, in its progress towards durability, importing certain syntactic elements from that preeminently stable genre.

From the point of view of this thesis, such an admonition effectively, and quite illegitimately, reduces the scope of a genre analyst's potential activity, requiring, as it does, a certain fidelity to the autonomous constitution of a genre, rather than understanding the pragmatic and explanatory power of discussing *Star Wars* as if it were a Western, of classifying it thus in order to accomplish a specific argumentative goal. Before we continue, however, it is to the third and final theorist under consideration here that we now turn, in order to complete our elaboration of the various shortcomings functioning in the field of film genre studies. Steve Neale's attempt is the most sophisticated of the three considered here, as it undertakes to account in more elaborate terms for the sort of negotiation implied by Schatz, and others, and made explicit, but not wholly explained, by Altman. Neale also, as we shall see, tries to broaden the terms of generic analysis, expanding the domain to include material beyond the specifically textual. Once again, however, we will discover a tendency to reassert description as the primary theoretical goal, with genre, as the object to be described, rendered within a familiar pattern of communication.

Steve Neale: Genre's Unconscious

In 1980, Steve Neale produced a small book that took the field of film genre studies to new theoretical heights. Neale's effort, like Altman's, were intended to address significant theoretical shortcomings in the field. Writing at a time when the study of film genre had reached a certain impasse, Neale was concerned to elaborate in explicit terms what had to date only been implicit. For Neale, work on genre had come to the end of an introductory period, the aims of which were, in large measure, polemical. Citing the work

of Tom Ryall, Ed Buscombe, Jim Kitses and Colin McArthur, Neale characterises the "impulses" behind their efforts, which "were largely twofold: on the one hand a desire to maintain and extend critical interest in mainstream, commercial — particularly Hollywood — cinema; on the other hand, a desire to qualify what had been up to that time the dominant critical method for discussing that area of cinema seriously, namely auteurism" (5). Subsequent to such initial work, contends Neale, "very little has been published . . . that has sought to extend it, either through a more systematic working out and application of the concepts and ideas it had already developed, or through a coherent critique and subsequent transformation of these concepts and ideas" (5).

Such, then, would be the aims of Neale's book. As a starting point, Neale offers Tom Ryall's "basic orientation" of the field of film genre studies to date: "The master image for genre criticism is the triangle composed of artist/film/audience. Genres may be defined as patterns/forms/styles/structures which transcend individual films, and which supervise both their construction by the filmmaker, and their reading by an audience" (7). Ryall's summary, argues Neale, identifies a number of key aspects necessary for the analysis of genre, yet fails to account for such aspects in anything more than a superficial manner. Neale writes:

> The problem . . . is that while an interrelationship central to an understanding of genre is clearly located, i.e. the triangle 'artist/film/audience,' there is no conceptual means offered for its analysis. There is no sense in which Ryall proposes a conception of audience and film maker as either self-consistent, autonomous instances of subjectivity or as simple empirical entities in their respective relations to the 'patterns/forms/styles/structures" of genre. However, the term he uses to indicate the mechanism(s) involved in these relations — 'supervise' — while suggesting its supra-personal force, fails to provide the conceptual apparatus necessary for its further specification. (7)

Neale's efforts are aimed at providing just such a conceptual apparatus, at investigating in explicit terms what is only suggested by Ryall's use of the verb 'supervise.' That Ryall's, and others, work is merely suggestive on this point is, for Neale, more than a mere oversight, revealing instead the presence of an ideology of subjectivity, an "ideology of a transcendent, self-consistent subject implicit in the simple communication model of author-text/system-audience" (7), that effectively prevents an adequate rendering of the determinate force of genre on both the 'artist' and the 'audience.' Such an ideology rests upon the presence of another unexamined assumption functioning in the work under consideration, namely the distinction between the realms of high and low,

or popular, art. While ostensibly claiming validity for the products of popular art, which are presented, according to the first polemical aim of the writers considered by Neale, as worthy of serious study, the realm of high art is nevertheless valorised, functioning as the space within which the artist is provided with an untrammeled opportunity for self-expression. For the popular artist, on the other hand, there are the impediments that result from the necessarily commercial aspect of their endeavours, functioning to limit the possibilities of the pure expression of his or her artistic vision. Such a distinction between the realms of the high and the popular, argues Neale, "rests on a fundamentally complicit acceptance of the basis of 'high art' ideologies: i.e. that the artist has a self-consistent, potentially autonomous and transcendent self and that art is its (more or less realised) expression" (8). Once accepted, the parameters for analysis become severely constrained. "The only argument," proposes Neale, "concerns the value to be placed on pure self-expression (high art) on the one hand, and self-expression mediated by established conventions (popular art) on the other" (8). The task of the genre critic, then, operating on the basis of such assumptions, is primarily to identify the limits imposed upon the popular film artist, and to evaluate the degree to which he or she has managed to, if not transcend such limits, at least achieve a modicum of self-expression.

Neale is concerned to effectively redesign the field of genre studies, to redraw its boundaries, by directly confronting such assumptions which had heretofore prevented the adequate analysis of the 'supervision' of both the artist and the audience. Most instructive for Neale is the means with which the distinction between the realms of high and popular art had been achieved, by determining, that is, the latter to be primarily 'commercial' while the former is understood as 'non-commercial.' Such a mapping, contends Neale, "effectively precludes a recognition, and hence a potential analysis, of the (different) ways in which all forms of artistic production in capitalist social formations take place within conditions provided by capitalist economic relations and practices and hence the ways in which the production and consumption of all art works are conditioned by commodity forms" (9). Neale's specific observations, however, are informed by a rather more broad notion of subjectivity. Confronting Ryall's use of the notion of 'supervision' with which he effectively distinguishes between the high and the popular (the former, apparently, free from any supervisory force), Neale argues for the necessarily constrained nature of subjectivity, and for genre as merely one form of the various modalities of such constraint. He writes:

> All forms of signification and meaning entail pressure: no subject is transcendent of such pressure or in control of its various modalities, hence no subject is in a position to simply operate these forms, whatever the conditions of production and consumption, whatever the form of economic relations within which production and consumption take place. Indeed, such pressure is precisely one of the most important of those conditions. Its modalities may vary within different signifying media and within different aesthetic systems, processes and ideologies across these media. But, as regards the fundamental fact of this pressure, no artist — and, indeed, no audience, no individual spectator or reader — is free, and this applies equally to the abstract expressionist painter, to the lyric poet working in his/her own home or studio, to the experimental film maker working only in 8mm and to the Hollywood director. It is at this point, given this overall framework of premises, and precisely, in a sense because of it, that it becomes important, indeed essential, to differentiate between the various modalities of pressure involved, and to relate them to the political, ideological and economic conditions in which they function and take effect. Generic conventions and the genre form itself should be viewed as one of the variants of the modalities of that pressure. (10)

Having recast genre as a mode of pressure operating to supervise the activities of both artist and audience, and having determined such pressure to be one of the variety of pressures operating within cultural and aesthetic discourse generally rather than as a unique characteristic of popular art, Neale embarks upon the task of elaborating the terms of such a modality. Starting from Christian Metz's characterisation of the "mental machinery" of the cinema, "which spectators...have internalised historically and which has adapted them to the consumption of films" (quoted in Neale, 19), Neale pursues the metaphor of the cinema as machine, designed for "the production of meanings and positions...for the regulation of the orders of subjectivity" (19). Genres are then understood as constituent elements of such machinery, as "components," as "systematised forms of the articulation of meaning and position" (19). More specifically, and in contrast to prior considerations, "genres are not to be seen as forms of textual codifications, but as systems of orientations, expectations and conventions that circulate between industry, text and subject" (19). Specifying further, and in relation to mainstream, Hollywood cinema, it is as a narrative mode that genre primarily functions. If mainstream cinema's product is narrative cinema, and if narrative is understood as the process whereby the passage between disequilibrium and equilibrium, disorder and order, is navigated, then genre provides the terms of such navigation.

Writing in 1980, Neale's efforts are informed by a post-Lacanian, post-Althusserian model of film analysis, represented most comprehensively in the pages of the journal *Screen*, and in the writings of Christian Metz, Laura Mulvey, and Stephen Heath,

among others.[1] For Neale, then, the terms of narrative are the terms of desire. More specifically, the desire of a subject for the experience of plenitude. Neale is careful to present the terms of spectatorial pleasure with an appropriate subtlety, not reducing such pleasure merely to the pleasure of closure, but characterising it as a multi-stage, multi-faceted process of coherence, whereby the pleasure of narrative excess is complemented by the (necessarily) accompanying pleasure of narrative closure. Genre provides the means with which he is able to render such complexity, or better, genre functions for Neale as the site at which the complexity of the narrative operation is effected. Having presented genre as a narrative modality, and understanding narrative in terms of its function *for* a subject, Neale is able to offer a considerably more complex rendering of genre, transcending the essentially superficial, which is to say iconographic and textual, descriptions that had been offered to date. Genre, in Neale's consideration, becomes the locus in mainstream cinema of the basic structuring activity of narrative, and may be described according to the specificity of its modality. Neale writes:

> Narrative is not simply a product or a structure, nor even a process of production, an activity of structuration. It is both a process of production and an activity of structuration, but it is so in and for a subject. The subject is a function, or better, a functioning of signification. Different modes of signification produce different functionings of subjectivity, moving the subject differently in their various semiotic processes, producing distinct modes of address. (25)

Key to the operation is the engagement of the subject in a process while at the same time ensuring, or guaranteeing, an eventual satisfactory conclusion to the process. Perhaps even more important is the inscription of such a guarantee within the very narrative process, providing the possibility of moments of disequilibrium, of incoherence, of narrative excess, all the time ensuring the spectator that such moments will be contained finally by the satisfaction of a return to equilibrium. In mainstream narrative cinema, such an inscription is realised through the internalised patterns of genre. "Fundamental...to the economy of the subject in mainstream narrative," argues Neale, "to the economy of its mode of address, is the achievement of the maintenance of a coherent balance between process (enunciation) on the one hand, and position (enounced) on the other" (25-6). More

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[1] The degree to which the terms of such theory have become integrated into academic film studies is suggested by the recent publication of the primer by Robert Stam, et. al., *New Vocabularies in Film Semiotics: Structuralism, Post-Structuralism and Beyond* (1992).

importantly, however, is the variety with which such a balance may be maintained. Neale continues:

> But this economy can be structured in a variety of ways. Genres represent systematizations of that variety. Each genre has, to some extent at least, its own system of narrative address, its own version of the articulation of the balance. Each genre also, therefore, engages and structures differently the two basic subjective mechanisms which any form of the balance involves: the want for the pleasure of process, and the want for the pleasure of its closure. (26)

What Neale has accounted for here, in theoretical terms, is an aspect of genre that had effectively been taken for granted, and which had been described with little or no reflection. It had become commonplace to describe generic patterns in terms of difference and repetition, typically in terms of the audience's desire for familiarity and its coexisting desire for novelty.[1] The industry's response was genre, with which it was capable of generating films that, on the one hand, were fundamentally similar in their constituent parts, but, on the other, were capable of accommodating various and variable arrangements of such parts. For Neale, such an observation was clearly not enough, failing, as it does, to provide an explanation of such desires, as well as an explanation of the apparently paradoxical relation between the desires. By means of a theoretical model, incorporating the recent gains of the post-structuralist/psychoanalytic approach, Neale is able to proffer such an explanation, proposing genre as one means by which the two aspects of desire, what Neale calls "the two 'wants' of narrative," excess and completion, are assimilated, made to work in concert, to fulfill the complex aims of mainstream narrative. "The coherence of mainstream narrative," argues Neale, "derives largely from the way in which...disphasure is contained as a series of oscillations that never exceed the limits of 'dramatic conflict' (that never, therefore, exceed the limits of the possibility of resolution), and from the way in which such conflict is always, ultimately, articulated from a single, privileged point of view" (25). Fundamentally, as is suggested by the phrase "series of oscillations," narrative coherence is a temporal phenomenon, whereby events are allowed to proceed apace, their procession, however, always tempered by the memory of past processions, the outcomes of which have consistently been successful in reordering whatever displacements such processions may have caused. "Mainstream narrative," observes Neale, "regulates complexly the times of its semiotic processes by balancing, on the one hand, points of advance in ceaselessly pushing the flow of text and subject forward, and, on the other hand, points of recall in

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[1] Cf. Schatz's feedback model.

ceaselessly containing that process in figures of repetition, folding it back on itself into the retrospective coherence of memory" (27). Neale's observations are based upon Roland Barthes' identification, in his seminal essay "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative," of a separate kind of narrative time, "a kind of logical time which has very little connection with real time, the apparent pulverization of units always being firmly held in place by the logic that binds together the nuclei of the sequence" (quoted in Neale, 27). While mainstream narrative, as a general phenomenon, inevitably constructs such a temporal logic, as Neale notes, "it can do so in a variety of ways, through a variety of modes of address institutionalised in a variety of genres" (27). Always, however, the logic, in its various forms, is fundamentally the same. It is the precise manifestation of this temporal logic that varies between genres. Again, taking his cue from Barthes, Neale is able to construct the means of distinguishing between genres, while at the same time asserting the generality of the narrative function of genres. Pursuing the notion of narrative's distortion of real time in favour of its logical requirements, Barthes offers the suspense narrative as a particularly exemplary mode. "Suspense," he writes, "is clearly only a privileged — or exacerbated — form of distortion: on the one hand, by keeping a sequence open (through emphatic procedures of delay and renewal), it reinforces the contact with the reader (the listener), has a manifestly phatic function; while on the other, it offers the threat of an uncomplicated sequence, of an open paradigm...that is to say, of a logical disturbance, it being this disturbance which is consumed with anxiety and pleasure (all the more so because it is always made right in the end)" (quoted in Neale, 27-8).

On the basis of Barthes' observations, Neale is able to elaborate a general claim about genre. Following Barthes' comments, Neale writes:

> This point, apparently so banal, is in fact fundamental not only for understanding the economy of pleasure in the mainstream text, but also for understanding the function of genres themselves: genres institutionalise, guarantee coherence by institutionalising conventions, i.e. sets of expectations with respect to narrative process and narrative closure which may be subject to variation, but which are never exceeded or broken. The existence of genres means that the spectator, precisely, will always know that everything will be 'made right in the end,' that everything will cohere, that any threat or any danger in the narrative process itself will always be contained. (28)

The precise manner in which such threats and dangers are contained is the means with which one may distinguish between genres. Each genre will employ its own specific strategies of containment based upon its particular deployment of narrative elements. Genres perform, for Neale, the function of determining precisely the terms in which

narrative is mobilised in its elaboration of a subject position, and it is by describing such mobilisations that one may describe distinct genres. Each genre will propose a threat, in diegetical terms, and will, at the same time, propose a strict number of responses and solutions to such threats. In the horror film, it is the straightforward threat of violence, originating from a 'monster' of some description, whether supernatural or psychological, which will eventually be neutralised in some manner or other. More generally, moving beneath the surface, so to speak, Neale argues that "what defines the specificity of this particular genre is not violence as such, but its conjunction with images and definitions of the monstrous. What defines its specificity with respect to the instances of order and disorder is their articulation across terms provided by categories and definitions of 'the human' and 'the natural.' [...] The monster, and the disorder it initiates and concretises, is always that which disrupts and challenges the definitions and categories of the 'human' and the 'natural'" (21). As a representation of a fundamental cultural disruption, the narrative's role is to propose a solution, with which the subject may experience the sensation of a reconciliation of sorts, a return to an order that is threatened by notions of the monstrous. Again, the specific mode of address of the horror film will offer its own solution, based on its specific mobilisation of the crisis. As Neale argues, "narrative disruption and disequilibrium [in the horror film] are specified overtly in terms of discursive disjunctions between 'the empirical' ('the real') and 'the supernatural' ('the unnatural'), as well as between the concatenation of diegetic events and the discourses and discursive categories used by the characters (and, often, the audience) to understand them" (22). Neale is now in a position to make a general claim about the horror film, the sort of claim that one could make about any distinct genre, describing it in the clearest and most basic terms:

> Hence the narrative process in the horror films tends to be marked by a search for that discourse, that specialised form of knowledge which will enable the human characters to comprehend and to control that which simultaneously embodies and causes its 'trouble'. The function of characters such as the psychiatrist in *Psycho* or Van Helsing in the *Dracula* films is precisely to introduce and articulate such a discourse. (22)

Despite the undeniable sophistication and complexity of his argument,[1] which effectively elevated genre theory into a new realm, Neale's efforts are marked by a number

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[1] These are perhaps rather generous terms. Others have taken Neale to task for the obfuscating nature of his prose, a failure he shares with a good number of his colleagues in post-*Screen* circles. Alan Williams, for one, in his essay "Is a Radical Genre Criticism Possible?" (1984), notes that, in *Genre*, "Neale has some

of simplifications, which he himself has admitted in later efforts. Perhaps most significantly, and likely as a result of his use of the terms of structuralist, psychoanalytically informed, theory, there is in Neale's account a tendency to hypostatise, to present his object in rather starkly trans-historical terms.[1] His definitions of genre, and of individual genres, perhaps too neatly cover the otherwise profoundly disparate history of the cinema. The "horror film," in Neale's lexicon, includes such a variety of films over such a period of time as to become a profoundly unwieldy category. In an effort to be made wieldable, all films with monstrous entities are reduced to a staging of the opposition between the real and the unnatural, with the inevitable reconciliation of such an opposition by means of an expert's discourse. That such a mechanism is employed in *Psycho* and *Dracula*, however, does not logically imply that this is the fundamental mechanism of reconciliation in every horror film, nor indeed that every horror film even offers such a reconciliation. Echoing William's critique of Thomas Schatz, I think I can quite confidently suggest that there are films that meet certain of Neale's requirements for 'horror,' yet quite categorically do not achieve reconciliation (in Neale's terms), nor even posit the opposition he has abstracted. Many films from the 1950s, which would introduce the threat of a monster or of an extraterrestrial entity, often ended on an explicitly ambiguous note, typically marked by the closing credit, "The End?", or by the incorporation into the film's conclusion a warning that the danger had not come to an end.[2] The threat in these cases needed to be sustained rather than neutralised (even in the phantasmic terms suggested by Neale), in order likely to provide the audience with a thrill that would extend beyond the end of the film and be integrated into their everyday regimes of anxiety about communist infiltration and nuclear catastrophe. Later films, such as John Carpenter's *The Thing* (1982; remake of the 1951 Hawks/Nyby original) and the *Alien* films, have employed ambiguous endings which bring into doubt the very capacity of

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very useful ideas, but they are buried in a prose that is the most unrewarding I've seen in a scholarly essay in a long time" (125).

[1] Such tendencies are currently being hotly debated in psychoanalytic circles. For statements of the problematic nature of certain psychoanalytically-informed concepts functioning in film studies, see Noël Carroll 1990, and David Rodowick 1987.

[2] The 1951 Howard Hawks/Christian Nyby film ***The Thing (From Another World)***, for instance, concludes with a radio dispatch from the Arctic post that had just been besieged by an alien creature, warning the world that the specific threat that had been faced by the inhabitants of the remote research station was only an indication of the more general threat faced by the whole planet. A reporter who had been on hand to see the battle with the alien is about to dictate his copy to reporters assembled at the Headquarters, but first prefaces his account with a warning: "And now before giving you the details of the battle, I bring you a warning. Everyone of you listening to my voice, tell the world — tell this to everybody wherever they are: watch the skies, everywhere. Keep looking, keep watching the skies."

science to deal with extra- or supernatural phenomena, and, by extension, the natural world itself.

In other words, the precise problem and solution, each necessary elements in Neale's definition of the genre (and of genre) as problem-solver, are often absent from films that are otherwise understood as horror films. A further problem is presented by films that incorporate elements understood to belong to the horror film and those from other generic repertoires. Mel Brooks's *Young Frankenstein* (1974), and Charles Lamont's *Abbott and Costello Meet Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1948), certainly represent an opposition between the human and the non-human, and employ classic iconographic elements from the horror film (in the case of *Young Frankenstein*, the props from the original James Whale production are used; in the *Abbot and Costello* monster series, actors from the original Universal horror cycle, including Boris Karloff, Lon Chaney and Bela Lugosi, reprise their classic roles), yet do they solve the same problems? One may answer that such films belong in another category, but Neale's model does not seem to offer the possibility of such intermediate spaces, suggesting instead the clear-cut differentiation of genres as distinct mobilisations of narrative strategies.

Such difficulties have been recognised by Neale himself, who has sought to ameliorate his position, focusing on the rather more indistinct boundaries between genres and the considerably more fluid and mobile status of the genres themselves. In an article from 1990, "Questions of Genre," Neale characterises his earlier effort as "an attempt...to explore the ways in which different genres exploit in different ways the features and characteristics of narrative film," admitting, however, that it was "an attempt somewhat marred by an over-schematic approach, by a lack of attention to hybridization, and, above all, by a lack of attention to history" (65). In the face of his earlier theoretical extravagances, which produced such inaccurate representations, Neale has changed tack, putting aside theoretical *over*generalisations, seeking instead to render, through close observation to historical data, a more faithful accounting of the process of genre. Neale's is still an effort to describe, to generalise, to chart the parameters of genre, but to do so now by attending to the materiality of genre, the specificity of it, which is also to say, the extra-textuality of genre.

"Genres," writes Neale in 1990, "do not consist only of films: they consist also, and equally, of specific systems of expectation and hypothesis which spectators bring with them to the cinema, and which interact with films themselves during the course of the

viewing process"(46). Such systems, which establish specific regimes of verisimilitude,[1] provide the spectator with the means to understand certain films. "They are," he argues, "a way of working out the significance of what is happening on the screen: a way of working out why particular events and actions are taking place, why the characters are dressed the way they are, why they look, speak and behave the way they do, and so on" (46). These systems are constituted by what Neale calls "institutional discourse," and it is the terms of such a discourse that Neale now sees as the main object of inquiry. "I do not believe," writes Neale, "the aim of generic analysis is the redefinition of a corpus of films" (51), which, effectively, was the result of his earlier effort. Such attendance simply to the textual aspect of genre obscures the *excessiveness* of genre, which is to say, the aspects of it that exist beyond the corpus. Rather, the goal of the genre analyst is reconceived by Neale, whose task now is to elaborate the discursive means by which genres are constituted. It is at this point that Neale defines in more precise terms the concept of institutional discourse, making it available, thereby, to historical study. Having enlarged the notion of genre to include the spectators' knowledge, the "systems of expectation and hypothesis" with which he or she is capable of making sense of a film, it is to the elaboration of such systems that Neale turns his attention. By doing so, he argues, he may avoid the inherent reductionism of the sort of genre analysis that has considered only the textual aspects of genre, and ignored, or devalued, the industrial/journalistic discourses that surround the films.[2] The results of such reduction consist mainly in "the separation of genre analysis from a number of the features which define its public circulation" (51). Neale continues: "These features include the fact that genres exist always *in excess* of a corpus of works; the fact that genres comprise expectations and audience knowledge as well as films; and the fact that these expectations and the knowledge they entail are public in status" (51).

The key term here, of course, is 'public.' Neale's newly enlarged notion of genre will include the materials provided by journalistic and industry discourses, and their role in the elaboration of regimes of generic knowledges that are employed by spectators. He is not willing to consider the uses to which such knowledge may be put by various interpreters, nor does he incorporate critical and scholarly discursive activity, his own included, that must be seen to contribute to the elaboration of such knowledges. Neale is

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[1] Neale is very careful to distinguish between the verisimilar and the realistic. We may experience verisimilitude in a film when a character breaks into song, not because we understand it to be a normal everyday activity that we may experience in real-life, but rather because we have been educated into a knowledge of films in which characters are likely to break into song.

[2] Neale specifically cites Altman' reluctance to consider such discourses. See Neale, p. 51.

ready to admit that the parameters of generic knowledge are broad and potentially unmappable, that the variety and plurality of audiences could produce an equally plural and various complex of knowledge systems, but his field of study must, out of necessity, be circumscribed. "Clearly," he writes,

> generic expectations and knowledges do not emanate solely from the film industry and its ancillary institutions; and clearly, individual spectators may have their own expectations, classifications labels and terms. But these individualized, idiosyncratic classifications play little part, if any, in the public formation and circulation of genres and generic images. In the public sphere, the institutional discourses are of central importance. Testimony to the existence of genres, and evidence of their properties, is to be found primarily there. (52)

In his effort now to avoid theory, such questions of the interpreter's (potentially idiosyncratic) activity must out of necessity be set aside. It will be only to concrete physical evidence that he will have recourse, the public discursive material understood to provide the terms of the regimes of verisimilitude that are simply provided for, i.e. communicated to, the film viewer, who, thus armed, may make sense of the genre films he or she will see. Having proved unsatisfactory in its generality, theory is now set aside by Neale in favour of an empiricism which will allow him to observe and describe the terms with which generic information is communicated to audiences, providing them with the terms to understand a genre film. Whether they comply with or resist such terms seems to Neale to be an unanswerable question, as he apparently settles simply for an attempt to describe the terms with which the industry would *like* their audience to view their films. We will, in due course, offer an alternative to such an exclusion, proposing instead a theoretical practice, along the lines suggested by literary scholar and theorist Adena Rosmarin. Rather than seeking to account fully or objectively for genre, either endeavouring to achieve a theoretical exhaustiveness and generality, or remaining faithful to the objective aspects of generic discourse, such a practice will understand its goals in precisely pragmatic and rhetorical, which is to say, interpretive, terms. Once presented, such a pragmatic critical activity will be understood to function, with and in relation to the activities of other various agents, within an interpretive network, rendered schematically by recourse to the Peircean notion of the sign. It is according to such a model that the activities excluded by Neale (similar to those excluded by Altman) may begin to be accounted for. Some further remarks, however, concerning the approaches to genre we have just considered, are called for.

We may begin with Neale, whose more recent work is indicative of a rather more general effort underway in film studies to move beyond interpretation, to consider only 'the facts,' to subordinate the critic's role to the determinant historical force of the text. The interpretive activity of the film critic is opposed to the firmer, more objective, efforts of the historian. Increasingly, the effort is towards the specificity, the minutiae, of filmic phenomena, towards a fully empirical and descriptive project. Film studies' earlier theoretical efforts are understood to have been essentially 'interpretive,'[1] which is to say impressionistic and unrigourous, and to have been blind to the reality of the cinema, reducing its actual heterogeneity to easily assimilable patterns, patterns that conformed to the interpreters' desires for order and simplicity. In response, the primary goal in much of recent film studies is the adequate representation of such a reality, one that defies such desires, and seeks to reduce the interventions of the interpreter, to escape the constraints of theory. There has been, in other words, an effort to 'solve' the problems of earlier theoretically descriptive efforts by admitting the actual complexity of the object of inquiry, and foregoing any attempt at achieving exhaustiveness. The solution, however, whereby genre is historicised, understood effectively to mean complexified, is an illusory one. By temporalising their object, they have rendered it 'harder to see,' harder to account for in all aspects — in effect explaining the inadequacies and insufficiencies of the earlier theoretically descriptive project. No wonder exceptions could always be found to the most carefully considered account. The diachronic nature of genre, the very complexity of the object, militated against the possibility of any exhaustive account. An adequate representation now effectively means admitting as much. The project, then, has not

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[1] A quite complex and sophisticated presentation of this claim is offered by David Bordwell in *Making Meaning*. Characterising film studies as effectively moribund, blind to its own impressionistic and *ad hoc* use of theoretical concepts in the service of a comprehensively *non*-theoretical, which is to say interpretive, project, Bordwell presents as a remedy a historical poetics of the cinema, the main terms of which are provided by, among others, the work of the Russian formalists. What Bordwell calls "contemporary interpretation-centered criticism" tends, in his estimation, "to play down film form and style. It leans to an unacknowledged degree upon received aesthetic categories without producing new ones. It is largely uncontentious and unreflective about its theories and practices. As if this weren't enough, it has become boring" (261). It is, effectively, an end to interpretation that Bordwell calls for. "We need no more diagnoses of the subversive moments in the slasher film, or celebrations of a 'theoretical' film for its critique of mainstream cinema, or treatments of the most recent art film as a meditation on cinema and subjectivity" (261). Against such "conservative and coarse-grained" (261) criticism, Bordwell offers his poetics, defined as "the study of how, in determinate circumstances, films are put together, serve specific functions, and achieve specific effects" (266-7). Bordwell offers as "[a] paradigmatic instance of cinematic poetics . . . [André] Bazin's model of the 'evolution of the language of the cinema,' which proposes an account of changing norms of cinematic construction and style" (267). See Bazin 1: 23-40. As an indication of the intensity of the debate fueled by Bordwell's book, see the 1993 Special Issue of *Film Criticism*, "Interpretation, Inc."

changed, but has, rather, accepted its own shortcomings, effectively incorporating such shortcomings into the new version of the genre theorist's project of description. The central question, *what*, with its immanentist implications, has remained the same. It is the nature of the answer that has changed, transformed from potentially exhaustive to always necessarily incomplete.

Rather than an ever more precise and detailed question of *what*, though, it is the question of *how* that should serve to guide the investigations of the genre theorist. More precisely, the question is how has the concept of genre been mobilised in order to organise the manifold products of the cinema? To what end have the various categories that have been elaborated been directed? How has such categorising served the needs of the various discursive communities concerned with the cinema? Such questions serve to redirect the focus of genre theory, away from immanent analyses to more practical considerations, to an analysis of the purposiveness of the concept, or of the elaboration and application of the concept. Such a redirection is premised upon a rather significantly different notion of 'concept.' My argument so far has been that genre has suffered from a certain debilitating reification in most accounts, that it has served as the primary object of analysis, and has been understood to be subject to a certain taxonomic project. Genre, that is, has been understood as a thing rather than as a conceptual activity, and such an understanding has not been remedied by the recent revisions of the field. What this has obscured is the fact that genre has served a variety of practical purposes throughout the history of the cinema, and that far from being a coherent *a priori* category which may be described, and into which specific films may be placed, it has functioned as a strategy, employed in a multitude of ways, in a variety of contexts and toward an array of ends.

Most genre theorists, as we have seen, have intuitively recognised the variability in the strategic conceptual application of genre, yet have failed to adequately account for such variability. This is evident from the emphasis in genre theory, to varying degrees, on the questions of history and institutional discourse, and the recent dramatic increase in such emphasis. Both are crucial in any adequate account of the function of genre, yet, as I've suggested, the initial premises that have guided inquiry in genre theory to date have been maintained and have significantly limited the scope of the application of such questions. In most cases, the initial characterisation of genre as an autonomous, *a priori* category has encouraged the notion of the historical *development* of genre, typically characterised in terms of growth or evolution. Variability is thus misconstrued as a pattern of development, rather than as a manifestation of the altering needs of the film industry, of the critical and

scholarly communities, and of the various audience constituencies. Efforts have been made to escape the organic metaphor of development, to resist the characterisation of history in evolutionary or teleological terms, but, as I've said, much of the traditionally descriptive project is maintained. With likely unintended irony, however, the capacity of the describer has, in line with the inherent limitations of the theoretical approach, been circumscribed. The limits of the theorist, that is, have been transformed into the virtues of the historian.

III Film Genre/Film History

From our review of the main currents in film genre theory a number of general points may be made. First, and perhaps most significantly, the three main theorists under consideration, despite certain fundamental differences in assumption and approach, have, nevertheless, pursued similar goals. Each, that is, has endeavoured to provide, in effect, a formal, or structural, account of genre and/or genres. Each asks 'what': what is genre? what is the Western? what are its constituent elements? what have been the various configurations of such elements? As a result, each is led to propose a specific *description* of genre, understanding genre to be available to observation, each of its constituent elements capable of being described, which is to say, *represented*, in as full a manner as possible. Once identified, such an object's progress through history may be tracked. Schatz begins with a straightforward accounting of genre's key components: "a genre film ... involves familiar, essentially one-dimensional characters acting out a predictable story pattern within a familiar setting" (6). In a certain sense, the development of genre for Schatz effectively involves an increasing recognition of such simplicity, resulting ultimately in a generic reflexivity. History, then, is construed in terms of a simply positive development, of an increasing canniness. In the face of such a naïve characterisation ignoring, as it does, the more dynamic aspects of genre, Altman and Neale have incorporated additional elements into their descriptions. Altman, endeavouring to explain the mechanism by which genres are modified over time, makes the distinction between a genre's semantics, its textual materials, and its syntax, the organisation of such materials, allowing him to offer a "working hypothesis," a preliminary rendering of the constitution of a genre, understood as an evolving complex of elements: "I suggest that genres arise in one of two fundamental ways: either a relatively stable set of semantic givens is developed through syntactic experimentation into a coherent and durable syntax, or an already existing

syntax adopts a new set of semantic elements" (34). Provided with such a map, Altman may then chart the changes undergone by specific genres in the process of their evolution.

> In dealing with the early development of the musical, for example, we might well follow the attempts during the 1927-1930 period to build a backstage or night-club semantics into a melodramatic syntax, with music regularly reflecting the sorrow of death or parting. After the slack years of 1931-1932, however, the musical began to grow in a new direction; while maintaining substantially the same semantic materials, the genre increasingly related the energy of music-making to the joy of coupling, the strength of community, and the pleasures of entertainment. (34)

Neale, for his part, has endeavoured to incorporate into his consideration the function of extra-cinematic discourses and the specific regimes of verisimilitude that such discourses constitute. For Neale, it is important to acknowledge that an adequate accounting of genre or genres would include more than attendance simply to the films themselves. Of equal importance, in Neale's recent work, is the presence of the spectator who comes to a film armed with, as he says, "specific systems of expectation and hypothesis...which interact with the films themselves during the course of the viewing process" (1990: 46), such systems having been provided by the discursive networks within which films are produced and marketed.

Both Altman and Neale have endeavoured, in other words, to work out in more detail the consequences of their incorporation of historical and discursive forces into an account of genre. In itself this is a laudable goal, and has taken film genre studies far beyond the earlier impressionistic, and often strictly evaluative, studies of the past. While the concept of genre has, in both accounts, become considerably more subtle and complex, there remains, nonetheless, a persistent tendency to return finally to a vocabulary of existence and visibility. Genres, for both Altman and Neale, are still available to the theorist's eye for observation, are still existent structures with properties and characteristics which may be described with greater or lesser accuracy. The act of description has certainly become complexified for both, but it is still fundamentally *as* description that their projects are understood, and in that sense their accounts are essentially unchanged from earlier efforts. Unable to ignore the forces of history and discourse, in other words, each has reconceived genre in considerably more mobile and temporal terms, while maintaining at the same time, however, the sense of a solid core that remains distinguishable, available to the close inspection of the analyst. For each, that is, genre remains to be *seen* — the seeing, however, requiring rather more effort than earlier accounts have suggested, given the historical and discursive web within which the genre is tangled.

For Altman, the observability of genre is cast, somewhat surprisingly, in rather normative terms. The struggle, over time, between the syntactic and semantic aspects of genre is eventually resolved, such resolution producing a certain stability, thus allowing the genre theorist a starting point from which he or she may work backwards, tracing retrospectively the progress made towards the moment of durability (which is to say, the moment a genre becomes comprehensively visible). "The Hollywood genres," writes Altman, "that have proven the most durable are precisely those that have established the most coherent syntax (the Western, the musical); those that disappear the quickest depend entirely on recurring semantic elements, never developing a stable syntax (reporter, catastrophe, the big caper film, to name but a few)" (1986: 38). It is such coherency and stability that allows the analyst the opportunity to identify the genre and place it appropriately within the flow of time. Certainly, in these terms, the Western is a more 'visible' genre than the catastrophe film, and it is, unsurprisingly, the genre that is given the most attention in Altman's account; and it is the musical that Altman has subjected to book length study, rather than the far less visible reporter or caper film. Altman's is a version of the story of the survival of the fittest, only those genres with the most vigorous constitutions being worthy of sustained analysis, their histories stretching clearly over time as opposed to the failed trajectories of other less vital genres, the faintness of which precludes a sustained analysis.

With Neale, the vocabulary of the visible is more explicit. Having moved beyond the self-admitted excesses of his initial efforts in genre theory, his overschematization and a-historicism, Neale offers a characterisation of genre "as process." Rather than static entities, genres are now seen by Neale as constantly evolving categories, whose boundaries are regularly tested and repertoires continually reorganised with each new addition to the corpus. Every new film alters the terms of the genre, repositioning what Neale has called — following, among others, Hans Robert Jauss — the genre's position on the "horizon of expectation."[1] The full force of the metaphor is employed by Neale, allowing the genre analyst to place his object perpetually out of plain view, always just over the horizon, always moving away from the theorist's advances. Once such a relationship between the observer and his object of observation is established, the inherent difficulties of the descriptive project may be explained away. Seen now as process, as, in Jauss' words, "a process of the continual founding and altering of horizons" (quoted in Neale, 1990: 56-7),

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[1] See Hans Robert Jauss, *Towards an Aesthetic of Reception* (1982)

genre is understood as never fully available to the scrutiny of the analyst. The perpetually shifting horizon, argues Neale, "is one reason why it is so difficult to list exhaustively the characteristic components of individual genres, or to define [again, read 'describe'] them in anything other than the most banal or tautological terms: a Western is a film set on the American Western frontier; a war film is a film that represents the waging of war; a detective film is a film about the investigation of criminals and crime; and so on" (57). One will, once the object has been placed just over the horizon, never be able to fully account for its properties in any exhaustive way. As Neale insists:

> *Exclusive* definitions, lists of *exclusive* characteristics, are particularly hard to produce. At what point do Westerns become musicals like *Oklahoma!* (1955) or *Paint Your Wagon* (1969) or *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* (1954)? At what point do Singing Westerns become musicals? At what point do comedies with songs (like *A Night at the Opera* (1935)) become musical comedies? And so on. (57)

In the face of such a dilemma, Neale is led to posit *degrees* of 'purity,' as various genres, over the course of time, and as a result of periodic 'contact,' exchange and borrow elements, producing generic 'hybrids.' Such hybridisation, in fact, is understood to be far more common than pure examples. "Hybrids," Neale contends, "are by no means the rarity in Hollywood many books and articles on genre in the cinema would have us believe. . . .Indeed, in its classical era, as Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson have shown, nearly all Hollywood's films were hybrids insofar as they always tended to combine one type of generic plot, a romance plot, with others" (57).[1] It is, one must admit, difficult to imagine what a 'pure' genre film would look like, especially if one is never able to produce the exhaustive list of characteristics one would need in order to make such an identification. Neale admits as much when he writes that "it is at least arguable that many of the most apparently 'pure' and stable genres, both inside and outside the cinema, initially evolved by combining elements from previously discrete and separate genres either within or across specific generic regimes" (58).

Still, in order for Neale to proceed according to the terms of his traditionally descriptive project, he needs the means with which to identify at least a core of purity, an indication of whether a film is more preponderantly a musical or a Western, whether it is a Western musical, a musical Western, or a Singing Western. Such means, he insists, are to

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[1] See David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson's *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* (1985).

be found in strict, empirical, historical study. In distinct contrast to his earlier efforts, Neale argues for:

> the importance of *historicizing* generic definitions and the parameters both of any single generic corpus, and of any specific generic regime. For it is not that more elaborated definitions are impossible to provide, just that they are always historically relative, and therefore historically specific. It is not that the process-like nature of genres render generalizations invalid. Genre films, genres and generic regimes are always marked by boundaries and by frameworks: boundaries and frameworks which always have limits. Thus even hybrids are recognized as hybrids — combinations of specific and distinct generic components — not as genres in their own rights....The point, though, is that if these limits are historically specific, they can only be determined empirically, not theoretically. (58)

As a model for such a 'historicization,' Neale turns to the that proposed by the Russian Formalists,[1] which "has the virtue of embedding the history of individual genres within the history, not just of generic formations, but of wider cultural formations as well" (59), and specifically to the notion of 'the dominant' as elaborated by Juri Tynyanov. Against other, more organic and teleological, models, the Formalists' model, in Jauss' words, "of genre as a historical system of relations" (quoted in Neale, 59), provides Neale with a much more subtle means of organising what he has described to this point in terms of mobility, difference and disparity. "As a theory or model," Neale contends,

> it takes account of the historicity, not only of genres, but of specific generic regimes; it takes account of their process-like nature; and, in its insistence on the importance of an interplay between canonized and non-canonized genres, it takes account both of the transience of generic hierarchies, and of the role of hybridization in the formation and dissolution of individual genres. (60)

As process, as a continuous cycling and recycling of generic materials, and as a fundamentally hybridised phenomenon, Neale is able to represent film genre in considerably more complex and subtle terms than previous commentators. No longer are genres understood to be static categories into which individual films may be fitted, ill or well. Seen now to mobilise elements from a variety of generic regimes, both cinematic and non-cinematic, genres and genre films may be characterised in considerably more

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[1] While Neale cites the Formalists' work on literary theory, specifically Boris Eikenbaum's "The Theory of the Formal Method," and Jury Tynyanov's "On Literary Evolution," in Ladislav Matejka and Krystyna Pomorska, eds., *Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views* (1978), a collection of essays by several key figures on specific issues of the cinema is provided in Herbert Eagle's anthology *Russian Formalist Film Theory* (1981). The collection includes an essay proposing a theory of "cine-genres" by A. Piotrovskij, which Neale does not mention.

heterogeneous terms. At the same time, the necessary distinctions may still be made, so that the very notion of genre is maintained, by endeavouring to isolate those elements that are 'dominant' in particular genres and genre films and at particular historical moments. The description of genres may then proceed apace, always, however, recognising the complexity of the object to be described. On the basis of "the Russian Formalist idea that genres can involve a 'dominant' (or dominating) aesthetic device (or ideological element)," writes Neale, "...particular genres can be characterized, not as the only genres in which given elements, devices and features occur, but as the ones in which they are dominant, in which they play an overall, organising role" (65-6). One may, then, construct equations, which, while ostensibly the culmination of his efforts, seem to bear a striking resemblance to the tautologies noted earlier by Neale. On the basis of the dominant, Neale writes,

> it could be argued, for example, that the epic is marked by the dominance of spectacle; that the thriller and the detective genre, especially as discussed by Dennis Porter and Kristin Thompson, are dominated by the devices of suspense, narrative digression, and hermeneutic delay; and that, as the Russian Formalists themselves have argued, melodrama involves the subordination of all other elements 'to one overriding aesthetic goal: the calling forth of 'pure,' 'vivid' emotions.' In doing so, however, emphasis again must be placed on the fact that dominant elements are not necessarily exclusive elements, elements that occur only in the genre concerned. Clearly, spectacle, digression, suspense and the generation of passion and emotion are properties common to all Hollywood films. (66)

Little has really changed, then, in Neale's account. The observation and description of genres has merely been complicated. Given that each genre film contains elements of others, the task is no longer to determine simply to which genre a film belongs, according to a theoretically precise description of the genre, but rather to match films to genres according to the observation of rough resemblances. The difference, however, is really no difference. Neale's initial efforts were directed towards a final and exhaustive, if theoretical, description of genre. In the face of the numerous exceptions to such a description, the theoretical is replaced with the empirical. Neale's goal now is to see genre and genre films in all their actual complexity. Unable to find the proper fit theoretically, Neale is now endeavouring to find it historically, and in an effort to preclude the presentation of exceptions he has characterised the historical in ultimately incommensurable terms. He will, that is, offer only approximate matches. In both cases, though, it is still a 'fit' that is sought, a mirror-like correspondence, between the object and its representation. The conflict is between a theoretical and a historical fit, the former, for Neale, too neat and therefore less believable; the latter more in keeping with the reality of genre.

This conflict, however, belies the fundamental similarity between the two positions. In each case, the effort is towards achieving an equivalence between the object and its representation, such equivalence effectively proving the perspicacity of the observer/theorist. What Neale, and traditional genre analysts generally, continue to offer, whether theoretically or historically, is a discovery, presenting their object as 'found', denying its status as a premise, as a tool, as a concept contingent upon the analyst's specific critical needs. As Adena Rosmarin notes, "[w]ith few exceptions criticism has treated genre not as the critic's explanatory tool but as a hypothesis, a probable stab at the truth, something whose inherence in a particular literary text or whose independent existence as a schema is potentially verifiable or, at least, refutable" (25-6). The determination of the truth of genre, of its verifiability, has traditionally been pursued by one of two basic means. Rosmarin continues, elaborating upon her point:

> The characteristic treatment, in other words, has been to naturalize or historicize the genre by retrospectively 'finding' it in the literary text or to hypostatize it, making it 'theoretical.' But this treatment, *which is in either case representational*, is neither necessary nor ultimately persuasive, for both historicized and hypostatized genres similarly lose credibility as their unacknowledged definitional nature becomes increasingly obvious with increasing use. (26, my emphasis)[1]

Exceptions, that is, may always be found to both historical and theoretical genres. That this is so presents a problem only if one has determined to present his or her account of genre precisely as "a probable stab at the truth." Understood as such, a certain fidelity is required, whereby one must either assimilate or refute exceptions, but in either case the mounting assaults will ultimately — and necessarily — corrode the edifice that has been constructed. If, on the other hand, genre is presented in explicitly heuristic terms, as a premise initiating the critic's activity, such fidelity is no longer required. The invitation to

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[1] Rosmarin's notion of the representational characterisation of knowledge is derived in large part from Richard Rorty's philosophical efforts, particularly in his *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979). Rorty describes philosophy according to its peculiarly epistemological pretensions. "Philosophy as a discipline...sees itself as the attempt to underwrite or debunk claims to knowledge made by science, morality, art or religion" (3). It is, by its own claim, foundational, and capable, thereby, of judging knowledge claims. "It can do so," argues Rorty, "because it understands the foundations of knowledge, and it finds these foundations in a study of man-as-knower, of the 'mental processes' or the 'activity of representation' which make knowledge possible. To know is to represent accurately what is outside the mind.... Philosophy's central concern is to be a general theory of representation..." (3). Rorty's efforts are directed towards resisting the notion of representation, and elaborating a "philosophy without mirrors," such efforts understood to follow in the pragmatist tradition established by Peirce and James, and manifested in the "holistic, antifoundationalist, pragmatic treatments of knowledge and meaning which we find in Dewey, Wittgenstein, Quine, Sellars, and Davidson..." (317).

exception, which is inscribed within both theoretical and historical representations of genre, and which threatens the very viability of each position, is effectively neutralised once the attempt at representation has been abandoned.[1]

Perhaps counter-intuitively, it is the baring of the critical mechanism, so to speak, that ensures its full and convincing operation, while efforts to disguise the constitutive power of critical activity are what will, inevitably, undermine the traditionally representative project. "Genres," writes Rosmarin, "are always and obviously open to question, and this questioning inevitably discovers the inconsistency between the critic's descriptive claim and his constitutively powerful premises" (26). She continues:

> This vulnerability, however, is a consequence not of genre per se but of trying to write genre criticism while simultaneously making representational claims. It is a consequence of denying not only genre criticism's deductiveness but also its pragmatism, of denying not only the premises and procedures of its reasoning but also their origin in the critic's explanatory purpose and their present-tense existence in his explaining text. (26)

As an alternative to such denials, Rosmarin's call is for a critical avowal, for an explicitly pragmatic critical activity that would not be required to determine the 'validity' of its schema, but would argue, rather, its usefulness. The critic's premises, understood by Rosmarin to have been "made" prior to the critical act, are then utilized as the ground against which the individual work will be matched. Typically, however, the sequence of events is reversed, so that it appears as though one begins with the individual text, which is picked up and transported to what is no longer understood to have been posited initially, but stands now as a firm *a priori* ground, which the text will resemble more or less accurately according to the skill of the critic charged with the task of description. Rosmarin compares such skill to that of the illusionistic painter, whose works are admired for their correspondence to the object represented, and whose striving towards such correspondence is understood as the primary goal. Following E.H. Gombrich's argument in his *Art and Illusion*, Rosmarin suggests that, "[b]ecause we are children of the Greeks and Romans, this striving strikes us as natural, even necessary, but in practice — or in theory — it is neither" (11). What is natural, rather, is, in Gombrich's words, "the reliance on schemata, on what is called 'conceptual art'" (quoted in Rosmarin, 10). The efforts at illusionism, at

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[1] Perhaps more precisely, the invitation is made explicit. While descriptions of genres are necessarily weakened by the submission of exceptions or corrections, a heuristic notion of genre can only be strengthened and expanded.

realism, though, are designed to disguise art's conceptual basis, effectively obscuring the trajectory of both the artist's activity and the history of art. In both cases, the desired result is the complete suppression of the schematic. It is not entirely clear, however, why such a result is desirable. The basic question, for Gombrich, "is not how and why painting, sculpture, and thought became conspicuously conceptual or schematic but how and why they became otherwise..." (10). Extrapolating from Gombrich's art historical investigations, Rosmarin considers the critical act, asking "how and why interpretation of any kind goes to the great and subtle trouble of attempting to conceal its conceptual origins and suasive purpose" (10). That it cannot finally achieve such concealment, "that no representation, however close its approach to ideal duplicity, can completely and tracelessly capture what it represents" (11), would seem to suggest that such efforts are precisely not worth the trouble.[1]

Such trouble is what Rosmarin's pragmatic critical activity seeks to avoid. It makes no effort to conceal its schematic suppositions, its conceptual beginnings, arguing instead for their practical value. The constitutive and pragmatic power of genre does not require a choice "between more or less 'valid' interpretations, but between those that are more or less useful" (20). Genre's usefulness resides, that is, not in its truth, but in its suppositional nature. Like the artist who begins with the supposition that a circle with two dots and two slashes within it be treated *as if* it were a face — not on the basis that it is a face, or even that it looks like a face, but because he is able to convince his potential interlocutor to agree that such a schema may usefully stand for a face — the genre critic similarly begins with a schema, which may, like the artist's schema, be modified and corrected, and against which a text or texts may be matched.

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[1] Which is not to say that illusionistic painting is to be abandoned, merely that its pretenses be dropped. This is registered in the choice of the adjective 'illusionistic' over the far more normative term 'realistic,' which has, typically, been used to describe such efforts. The skill of the illusionistic painter, as well as that of the critic, should be appreciated according to his/her manipulations of schema, rather than for any fidelity to the real, which, as I have been endeavouring to argue, is finally a chimera.

Chapter 3

> It has not been my concern to define horror or to adhere to the definitions of others. I have been guided for the most part by video rental store categorizations, which, despite some variation from store to store, seem to capture better than any definition I know what the public senses to be "horror."
>
> Carol Clover
> *Men, Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*[1]

I The Choice of Schemata

Presented with the notion of schema, however, one may legitimately ask what, precisely, is the source of such schemata. As the reader may have noted already, the critic's pragmatic activity, his/her making and matching, has so far been considered without explicit reference to any external forces. The fashioning of a premise does not, of course, occur *ex nihilo*. Once the critic's purpose has been determined, the appropriate material with which an argument will be fashioned is chosen from within a certain context. Earlier discourses, earlier schemata, are chosen, and may be corrected, or adapted, according to the specific rhetorical goals of the critic. Maintaining, for a moment, the comparison between the painter's schema for a face and the genre analyst's equally schematic argumentative premises, we may take as an exemplary instance of the availability of such schemata E. H. Gombrich's discussion of the various published formulae for the use of artists. In a tradition apparently initiated as early as 1538, with the publication of Heinrich Vogtherr's patternbook, providing examples of portions of the human anatomy, presented in clusters of disembodied heads, feet, hands, etc., for the student artist to draw from (literally and figuratively), there is a wide selection of books and pamphlets offering schematic renderings of human and animal figures as well as specific anatomical aspects. From Albrecht Dürer's *Dresden Sketchbook*, circa 1513, and Heinrich Lautensack's *Des Circkels unnd Richtscheyts. . .Underweisung*, published in 1564, to seventeenth century Italian catalogues of noses, ears, eyes and lips, to the *putti* of Frederick de Wit and Crispyn

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[1] Clover 1992, p. 5, ftnt. 5.

van de Passe (See Fig. 22), the faces of which we see reproduced in the paintings of Rubens, and others, the history of art may be seen less in terms of strict originality, or in terms of a fidelity to the natural, than in terms of a commonly attended to repertoire of schematic presuppositions.[1] Working quite consciously within a tradition of representation, artists like Rubens would skillfully execute their paintings, such skill determined less in terms of their fidelity to the natural appearance of a child, and according more to their adaptation of a commonly recognised and commonly utilised schema.

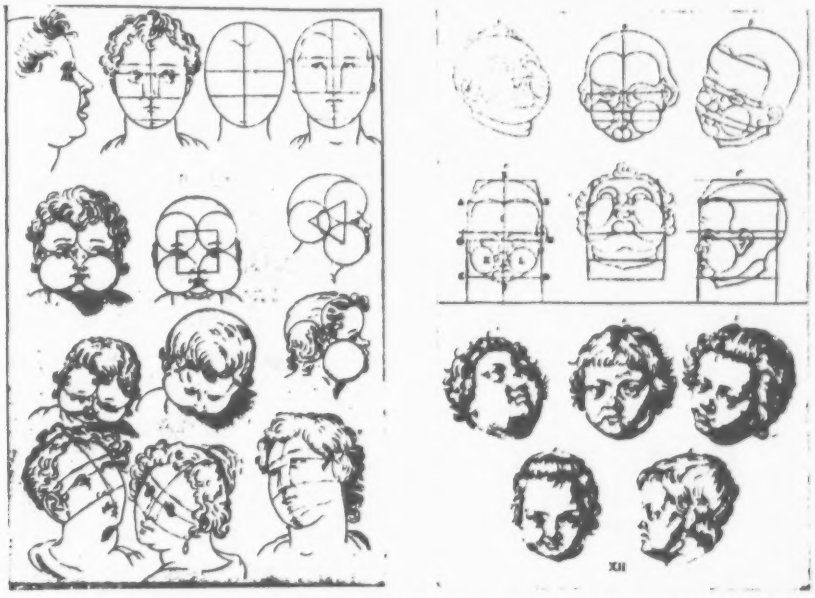

Fig. 22 The *putti* of de Wit (circa 1660) and van de Passe (circa 1643). (Adapted from Gombrich 1961: 182)

It will always be within such a context, wherein certain schematic notions will pertain, that one may be able to effect individual representations. The examples of the patternbooks and *putti* serve to demonstrate the often rather straightforwardly intertextual character of such contexts, where a tradition is explicitly codified, and recourse is made to such codifications precisely in so far as they are traditional and schematic. While typically not so explicit, the point is that recourse is always made, and that schemata are always available in one form or another, for an artist or, according to our specific concerns, for a critic. It is, as we shall see directly, in this sense that genre is fundamentally intertextual, each new account speaking against those that have come before, reorienting earlier

[1] See Gombrich 1961, 134 ff., for an exhaustive account of such patternbooks.

categorisations to new purposes — and that such schemata, in relation to the cinema, are available intertextually to the critic, or other interpretive agents, in more or less explicit forms. The manner of such reference, the systematic nature of such intertextuality, will be considered in specific terms below, as the interpretive network of film genre is subjected to a certain mapping. What such a map will allow us to see, first of all, is the precise manner in which the sorts of assumptions, that we have seen in our consideration of the activities of film genre theorists, are able to operate. On the basis of such a diagnosis we may, in turn, consider the terms of a more productive and functional genre project, based specifically upon an increased awareness of the terms of one's critical and theoretical activity, understood, in the strong sense, *as* an activity. Before pursuing these insights, however, in more general terms, I would like to consider a recent example of a work in film genre that may be examined according, precisely, to its exemplary qualities.

II The Pragmatics of Horror

Carol Clover, in her rather provocatively titled book, *Men, Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*, performs, to a certain degree, a critical act along the lines of Rosmarin's prescription, choosing a schema applied to rather different ends within another discursive realm, and adapting it to her own purposes as a critic engaged in a rhetorical project of explanation. The means with which Clover's schema is chosen will help us as we move towards more general questions of such choice, as well towards the consideration of the more general institutional nature of the cinema, beyond, but including, the specific critical activity of the film scholar. Clover, a scholar whose reputation has been established in the field of medieval Scandinavian literature, rather ostentatiously published a work in 1992 investigating the representation and function of gender in perhaps the most disreputable of popular cultural productions, the low-budget slasher film. In order to justify her foray into material that, as she admits from the outset, "lies by and large beyond the purview of the respectable (middle-aged, middle-class) audience [and] by and large beyond the purview of respectable criticism"[1] (21), Clover presents her original motivation

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[1] Works on the horror film typically begin with some sort of apology or explanation by the author, occasionally implied, often presented explicitly, explaining their choice of such a disreputable object. Noël Carroll, for example, in the preface to his *Philosophy of Horror* (1990), explains that his parents "inadvertently gave birth to this treatise by telling me not to waste my time and money on horror books, magazines, comics TV shows and movies. In a final act of defiance, I, a middle aged baby-boomer, have set out to prove to them that I was gainfully employed all along" (ix).

for the project in terms of her own transgression of such norms of respectability — norms which she had, to that point, carefully observed — and the insights that such a transgression generated. "This book," she writes, "began in 1985 when a friend dared me to go see *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. I was familiar with the horror classics and with stylish or 'quality' horror (Hitchcock, De Palma and the like), but exploitation horror I had assiduously avoided" (19).

Once confronted with these films, however, as a result of the original dare, Clover was able almost immediately to identify, according to the very crudity of the films, their value as registers of social and political dynamics, specifically in relation to contemporary gender politics. Blatant, unadorned, these films provided Clover, unexpectedly one suspects, with the material necessary to, first of all, perform certain social diagnoses, and, second, to bring into question certain traditional notions of spectatorship elaborated within contemporary feminist film theory. The status of the films as quite comprehensively beyond, as she says, the purview of respectable audiences and critics, their residence "at the bottom of the horror heap" (21) — which is to say, doubly disreputable — are specifically what recommend them to the analyst, and to the feminist analyst in particular. Eschewing the narrative and compositional niceties that allow most films to be admitted, if not to the pantheon of high art, at least to the gallery of middle-class entertainment, the exploitation horror film, stripped of most interpretive encumbrances, simultaneously becomes more "readable" and the site of potential resistance.[1]

Noting the rather cursory manner in which these films have been considered and, almost comprehensively, condemned and dismissed, Clover argues that the campaign organised against the films points directly to their value. Clover follows Robin Wood's rather resigned statement that despite the films' unassailably deplorable qualities, the brute fact of their popularity "suggests that even if they were uniformly execrable they shouldn't be ignored" (quoted in Clover, 22). However, she extends his observation, and argues that:

> We may go a step further and suggest that the qualities that locate the slasher film outside the usual aesthetic system — that indeed render it, along with pornography and low horror in general 'most likely to be betrayed by artistic treatment and lavish production values' — are the very qualities that make it such a transparent source for

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[1] Clover, at this point in her argument, however, falls into the familiar trap of confusing the lack of production values with the strategies of the politicized avant-garde. There is, also, a naïve tendency to equate crudity with simplicity and transparency, which may be objected to according to the lines along which I critique the vocabulary of visibility generally.

> (sub)cultural attitudes towards sex and gender in particular. Unmediated by otherworldly fantasy, cover plot, bestial transformation, or civilized routine, slasher films present us in startlingly direct terms with a world in which male and female are at desperate odds but in which, at the same time, masculinity and femininity are more states of mind than body. The premise of this chapter, then, is that the slasher film, not despite but exactly because of its crudity and compulsive repetitiveness, gives us a clearer picture of current sexual attitudes, at least among the segment of the population that forms its erstwhile audience, than do the legitimate products of the better studios. (22-3)

In many ways, Clover's is an interesting work. Her observations and remarks on a body of films that have been almost comprehensively ignored point up the very folly of such ignorance. She quite ably demonstrates, I think, the significance of the films by deliberately and explicitly framing them within a political and psychoanalytic context rather than an aesthetic one. My goal, however, is not specifically evaluative, but is, rather, more methodological — to see the means with which Clover is able to effect her argument. Clover's work is indebted to certain traditional approaches to the horror film, but, specifically in methodological terms, is a departure from the typical strategies and the assumptions upon which they are based. In most cases the analysis of the horror genre, or the horror film, in what will by now be familiar terms, begins with the assumption that the key to such analysis, the key to a faithful description of the genre, of all aspects of its constitution, lies within the particular texts themselves that are seen to comprise the general set.[1] A genre, then, is offered as a reified object, that exists as an amalgamation of all the individual texts of which it is comprised. Such an amalgam may change over time, as new

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[1] The terms of such a critique are familiar by now, and work on the Horror film, like work on genre generally, has been to the same degree to the sorts of difficulties we have already considered. Perhaps, even, to a greater degree, since it is a genre that is understood to be comprehensively visible, the criteria for evaluation so apparent. The most influential work is Carlos Clarens' classic text, *An Illustrated History of the Horror Films* (1967), which is often considered to be the first truly scholarly account of a genre whose baseness, whose status as a trivial if not downright dangerous entertainment, had prevented it, to that point, from receiving serious consideration. Clarens' text has provided at least the empirical foundation for most subsequent studies, and often the basic methodological assumptions. Proceeding chronologically, Clarens charts the evolution of the horror film, providing subsequent observers with the main examples of the genre, and with a fundamental methodological assumption, namely that the criteria used in the genre's definition are specifically textual and affective. The horror film is a film that mobilises monstrous characters in order to excite and horrify the viewer. Subsequent considerations of the horror film, while substantially different from Clarens' account and from each other in terms of their specific rhetorical goals, typically employ such a paradigm in order to isolate their object of inquiry. Some representative examples of subsequent considerations of the horror, premised to a large degree upon such assumptions, include Philip Brophy's essay "Horrality — The Textuality of Contemporary Horror Films" (1986), and Morris Dickstein's "The Aesthetics of Fright" (1984). Pursuing the question of the horrible in feminist terms, Barbara Creed has considered the films specifically of David Cronenberg in her essay "Horror and the Monstrous Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection" (1986).

particulars are added (and older ones may be dropped as a result, since the new definition can no longer sustain their inclusion), or the definition may be understood to have been set by an original, paradigmatic example, against which subsequent attempts are judged and determined to be eligible for candidacy or not.

The interpretive process in each case is similar, however. The category of the horror film, possessing a particular nature, is understood to exist and is described according to a close attendance to the characteristics of the particular occurrences which comprise it, in, as Alan Williams has observed, a hermeneutically circular pattern. The argument typically takes the form of a syllogism: horror films, understood as base and visceral, horrify; this particular film presents the horrific in these terms and it is horrifying; this particular film is a horror film. While the reasoning itself is sound, the difficulty lies in the assumption of the existence of the set posited in the first premise. Rarely is the assumption understood to be a pragmatic first step, the artificial construction of the notion of the set 'horror film,' following which one may then turn to a number of individual films with a ready means of analysis. Rather, the process is cast in the terms of discovery, so that the analyst is faced with an object, 'the horror film,' which, once found, must be described to the best of one's abilities.

Clover's work suggests the terms with which an alternative, pragmatic approach to the horror film may be undertaken. Hers is not a project of description, *per se*. Her goals are not those of the traditional genre critic, whose efforts are directed towards a discovery, upon which basis the enumeration of the significant attributes of a genre will be undertaken. Rather, Clover is concerned to provide suitable premises upon which an argument may be convincingly erected. While not entirely explicit about the rhetorical and pragmatic aspects of her project, she has, nevertheless, dispensed with a considerable amount of the preliminary elaborations of genre criticism, as well as with (perhaps inadvertently) the typical ontological assumptions. Clover is concerned to construct an argument about the manner in which certain films may be seen to engage audiences on the questions of gender, and of the narrative representations and functions of women. The films she is considering, "low-horror," function as the supports for her general claim, and do not, as a result, require exhaustive description, nor is she obliged to elaborate statements about the universal qualities of the films according to their membership in the general set of low-horror. She is not seeking to provide an exhaustive characterisation of the genre of low-horror, but has, rather, isolated certain aspects of an otherwise disparate set of films, posited a number of similarities between such aspects, and generated an argument

according to that very positing. Genre, for Clover, is not the object of her inquiry, but serves rather to initiate her argument — it is, in other words, an entirely functional discursive formation, one that will serve her specific rhetorical purposes.

Clover, while certainly not comprehensively so, is at certain points, clear about the functional aspects of her approach. She will, in order to effectively pursue her argument, consciously limit the scope of her considerations. She has a specific purpose in mind and is not concerned to account for all aspects of the phenomena she is investigating. In specific terms, she is endeavouring to counter the general claims feminist film theory has made regarding the constitution of the film spectator. Issuing from the seminal work of Laura Mulvey,[1] the cinematic gaze has been understood, according to the positioning techniques of mainstream cinema, to be fundamentally male. Constituted as the ideal subject position, the male spectator is the only legitimate possessor of the gaze, for whom there is a significant voyeuristic and sadistic pleasure. Logically derived from this is the characterisation of the female viewing position as necessarily subordinate. More precisely, the female spectator must assume the male position, affording her an experience opposite to the male's voyeuristic pleasure. Given that the object of the male gaze is woman, such an assumption by the female spectator may only be construed in masochistic terms. These two results, then, in Mulvey's argument, are the only ones available in mainstream cinema, and effectively reduce the potential variety of experiences.

Clover is concerned to account for alternative experiences, and has chosen films that, in her mind, reveal the possibilities for such experiences. She is not, however, undertaking to provide an exhaustive re-accounting of audience constitutions. On the contrary, she is explicitly designating — in effect *defining*, for her specific rhetorical purpose — a segment of the audience, young males, whom she will understand as the primary addressees of the films under consideration. On the basis of such a definition she will necessarily disregard other elements of the audience, but for purely suasive purposes. Her argument is presented in explicitly volitional terms. "I want to stress," she writes, "before I pass on to other matters, that the bias of my book is even more extreme than the bias of the overall horror audience. My interest in the male viewer's stake is such that *I have consigned to virtual invisibility* all other members of the audience, despite the fact that their loyalty and engagement can be just as ardent and their stake in the genre just as

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[1]See, Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975). The following is a brief and simplified account of the terms of Mulvey's and subsequent feminist theorists' elaboration of the notion of the male gaze, according to the specific needs of my argument.

deserving of attention" (7, my emphasis). She is, then, isolating a certain segment, despite, as she is quite ready to admit, the many other equally significant segments that may as justly call for investigation. But her strategy of isolation is justified on the grounds that she is not proposing to describe the "low-horror film audience" as a universal phenomenon, but has rather derived a segment of such an audience according to her own argumentative purposes. The distinction is spelled out by Clover:

> A study of horror film audiences per se would take into account the full range of their composition — not to speak of the range of experiences the same movie may offer the "rogue male," the adolescent boy, the middle-aged woman. This book, however, is not about horror audiences per se any more than it is about horror per se. It is a book that explores the relationship of the "majority viewer" (the younger male) to the female victim heroes who have become such a conspicuous screen presence in certain sectors of horror. (7)

Rather than "horror per se," then, as a general set, Clover sets out to consider a rather more idiosyncratically defined category. "I concern myself chiefly with American cinematic horror," noting parenthetically that it is "a category I define quite loosely" (5). What is important here is the volitional aspect of her designation. She is creating a category that directly suits her own pragmatic purposes, without feeling it necessary to maintain any particular fidelity to traditional, or traditionally naturalised, categorisations, and, importantly, without feeling obligated to offer her own comprehensive and inviolable description. The specificity of her designation is spelled out further, employing a variety of criteria determined according to her precise argumentative needs: she will be concerned "chiefly with films from the 1970s to the mid-1980s (with some reference back to progenitors), and only with those subgenres in which female figures and/or gender issues loom especially large: slasher films, occult or possession films, and rape-revenge films" (5).

In a footnote to these comments — which in itself is rather telling, suggesting the degree to which Clover is unaware of the significance of her own comments — she distinguishes her critical activity further from others who have considered the horror film, explicitly limiting the scope of her analysis, and, for our purposes, suggesting the means with which she is capable of rendering her own distinctions. She explains that: "I have been guided for the most part by video rental store categorizations, which, despite some variation from store to store, seem to capture better than any definition I know what the public senses to be 'horror'" (5, ftnt. 5). Putting aside for the moment the rather naïve invocation of authenticity, as well as the fact of Clover's own lack of self-awareness, it

may be useful to consider, according to this methodological confession, the means with which Clover has in fact been able to proceed. Clover's admission makes explicit what is typically disguised in film genre studies, namely that categories, genres, are fundamentally derivative. In each case, the genre critic has chosen among earlier categorisations, and has adapted such prior schemata according to his or her specific needs. Having visited her local video store, Clover has determined to follow the specific classificatory scheme it had employed (itself premised on earlier schemes) to provide the basic category that will function in her work. Rather, however, than being entirely faithful (which would, of course, require her to consider every film in the store listed as "horror"), Clover has determined to correct the schema according to the specific practical terms of her project. As an addition to, and an emendation of, feminist critiques of the cinema, Clover's work requires her to reduce the scope of the video store's category along certain specific lines. Applying the pertinent criteria (i.e., pertinent to her specific project), she determines to deal, as we have seen, "only with those subgenres in which female figures and/or gender issues loom especially large." Having started with a pre-defined set, which itself had been rendered according to specific practical needs — i.e., the marketing aims of the video store[1] — Clover has provided herself with a suitably altered set with which she may embark upon her project.[2]

What the exposure of Clover's — and, by extension, of genre critics' — strategies suggests is the systematic relatedness of genre and generic analyses. Each new study of film genre is initiated, explicitly or implicitly, by reference to previous studies, to previous categorisations. Each embarks upon its particular project having emended, or corrected, earlier generic schemata, providing the appropriate distinctions that will support its own rhetorical goals. It is, then, in terms of its *intertextuality* that genre is most appropriately characterised, stressing the necessarily intra-systemic character of generic activity, as well

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[1] While there are of course certain basic similarities between video stores, there are an increasing number of local differences as the video market becomes more diffuse and discriminating, and as stores become more concerned with differentiating themselves. The Blockbuster video chain, for instance, has an increasingly subtle assortment of classificatory criteria, separating comedies into classic comedies, romantic comedies, wild comedies, etc. A local, independent video store in Edmonton, Sneak Preview, prides itself in its sophistication and discrimination and has determined ever more elaborate schemes of classification, according to the lead actor, or to the director, distinguishing between national cinemas, separating American films into decades, isolating "films for the adventurous," and offering "zany British comedies." Of course the video store phenomenon has created a wholly peculiar genre, namely the "New Release."

[2] In many ways, as the imprecision of her language suggests, Clover is still participating in the traditionally descriptive genre project. It is likely due to the increasing tendency towards subjectivity in contemporary academic discourse that she inadvertently stumbles upon the terms of the schemata and correction that I am teasing out of her comments.

as its pragmatic and functional aspects. Given the industrial character of the cinema, the variety of discursive agents, at both the poles of production and reception, and the extensive and well-codified interpretive and classificatory productions of such agents (posters, theatrical previews, various other distribution materials; reviews and other journalistic accounts; scholarly and academic consideration; word-of-mouth accounts and generally shared public knowledge; etc.), it may be more accurate and more explanatory to say that it is, often, an *institutionalised* intertextuality that characterises the cinema. Provided by Jørgen Dines Johansen,[1] the phrase suggests the degree to which the production and reception of the cinema generally is informed by a variety of interpretive and classificatory discourses,[2] most of which are in textual form, each presented according to varying degrees of authority. (It is this variation, however, that will be of central concern in the analysis that I will undertake directly.) Recast in terms of such an intertextuality, the discursive network of genre becomes available for investigation and analysis, and the very notion of intertextuality itself may be understood in far more specifically functional terms. It is the breadth and extent of the intertextual network of film genre that most analysts, for the sake of economy, have sought to reduce (cf. Neale's methodological reduction).

Intertextuality has, by now, become a thoroughly familiar term, evoked often and with little accompanying explanation. As a phenomenon, intertextual reference, in both literature and the cinema, has been subject to increasingly exhaustive cataloguing, and has been presented primarily as a textual strategy designed to disrupt the sense of plenitude experienced by the reader or film-viewer confronted with traditional texts. While most acknowledge that literary and cinematic texts are more likely than not to participate to some degree in an intertextual network, a distinction has often been made between what might be called passive and active intertextualities.[3] Robert Stam, for instance, in his ambitiously encyclopedic work, *Reflexivity in Film and Literature: From Don Quixote to Jean-Luc*

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[1]Johansen 1993, pp. 328.

[2] Such classificatory terms including national cinemas, directors, periods, etc., as well as genre. Understood thus, one may avoid the tendency to separate genre from so-called "non-genre" films, which are not assumed to have been "classified" in the manner of a genre film. So understood, genre becomes one more classificatory scheme among many.

[3] Typically implicit in most discussions, this distinction has been presented explicitly in the entry "Intertextuality" in Thomas Sebeok's *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Semiotics* (1994). "Passively, it constitutes the basic condition of writing itself and the terms in which a text may be read. Actively, it enables the text to take up a position in relation either to the codes and conventions implied by these terms or to specific existing works of literature. As such it may take the form of pastiche, plagiarism, imitation, allusion, parody, irony, citation, etc." ("Supplement," Tome 1: 11).

Godard, traces the emergence of the concept, derived from Julia Kristeva's translation and adaptation of Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the dialogic, which Stam renders as "the simultaneous presence, within a literary work, of two or more intersecting texts which mutually relativize one another" (20). Pursuing the traditional extrapolation from Bakhtin's idea, Stam notes that:

> The concept of intertextuality suggests . . . that every text forms an intersection of textual surfaces where other texts may be read. [. . .] In the broadest sense, intertextuality refers to the vast reservoir of combinatory possibilities provided by the discursive practices of a culture, the entire matrix of signifying systems within which a single work is situated, and which reach the text not only through recognizable influences but also through a subtle process of dissemination. (20)

Having provided such an inclusive definition, however, Stam immediately reduces the scope of his project, arguing that "[a]lthough all films are intertextual, to paraphrase Orwell, some are more intertextual than others" (21).[1] Such active, or extra-intertextuality, so to speak, is what concerns Stam, specifically its critical and subversive results. "All the texts here discussed," he announces at the end of the first chapter, "strive to promote critical self-awareness in the spectator" (69), and it is such promotion that Stam is specifically concerned to celebrate.

Intertextuality, then, for Stam and others, is construed in normative terms as a radical and disjunctive textual strategy. It is in rather more broad, and specifically more functional, terms, however, that I am characterising genre as intertextual. More than a textually manifested technique of reflexivity, it is as a particular property of a semiotic system that I am defining intertextuality. As such, it is the general semiotic function of intertexts that concerns me, rather than the specific mobilisation of referential material within an individual text. As Martin Lefebvre has argued, in his introduction to a special issue of *Recherches sémiotiques/Semiotic Inquiry*, "Intertextuality and Interdiscursivity in the Cinema," "[t]he early development of intertextuality [has] led to a plethora of definitions, theories and methodologies, which have now taken their place in history. A newer and more urgent question now confronts us, and it is essential that we replace our original 'What' with a new 'Why'" (6). Having identified and catalogued instances of intertextuality, and having described such instances in terms of their radical disruptive potential, it is to the next step, whereby the more generally intertextual condition of the

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[1] Despite the promise implied in his title, it is by far an account of cinematic reflexivity. The number of films discussed significantly outnumber the literary texts.

cinema is considered, and is so in functional terms. Specifying his reformulation further, Lefebvre quotes Marc Angenot,[1] for whom "the question is not 'what does intertextuality mean,' but rather 'what purpose does it serve'" (6). Endeavouring to answer such a question, it is to a consideration of genre as an intertextually related sign system that I now move. The terms of such a consideration are provided in the main by a Peircean semiotic, the pragmatic aspects of which will enable us to foreground precisely the functional nature of such a system, and will, in addition, align the following with the insights that have been provided so far by Rosmarin's prescriptions for a pragmatic and rhetorical critical practice.

III The Semiotics of Genre

A semiotics of the cinema has, by now, become an almost commonplace notion. Its institutional stability is indicated, for instance, by the recent publication of a lexicon, edited by Robert Stam, Robert Burgoyne and Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, entitled *New Vocabularies in Film Semiotics: Structuralism, Post-structuralism, and Beyond*. In their preface, Stam et al. note the rigour that semiotics has brought to film studies, the advent of which effectively constituted a break from earlier, more "impressionistic" analyses of the cinema, and which has provided the main source of theoretical terms and assumptions in contemporary film studies. "Ever since film theory broke free," they argue, "from the impressionistic debate about auteurism and 'realism' which had dominated film critical discourse through the early 1960s, film semiotics and its developments have been at the center of the analytic enterprise in film" (x). While chastened somewhat by post-structuralism's critiques of semiotic's original scientism, so that "film semiotics has partially retreated from its earlier totalizing claims, [it] remains," they contend, "a dynamizing presence within reflexion on film" (x). Perhaps most importantly, it has placed the study of the cinema within broader considerations of cultural phenomena, which may be approached with appropriately general and powerful tools of analysis. In this way, the cinema, understood via semiotics, becomes one of the many culturally defined signifying practices available to the generalised approach of the semiotician. As Stam et al. put it:

> The growth of semiotic theory and the presence of its vocabulary in a variety of intellectual fields confirms the importance of "the science of signs, sign systems and signifying practices" as a tool for addressing the semantic riches of extremely diverse

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[1] See Angenot 1983, p. 132.

> cultural forms, while semiotic's cross-disciplinary thrust constitutes an antidote to the fragmentation and compartmentalization of intellectual disciplines. (x)

Despite, however, the generally ambitious tone of this passage, film semiotics has, on the whole, remained limited in its scope. Derived essentially from Saussurean semiology, and initiated specifically by Christian Metz's 1964 essay "Le cinéma: langue ou langage?", it has been fundamentally by means of an analogous characterisation of the cinema as language that film semiotics has proceeded.[1] For Stam et al., such a characterisation is inevitable. Insisting that semiotics "must be seen within the broader context of the language-haunted nature of contemporary thought," which has language functioning as "a fundamental paradigm, a virtual key to the mind, to artistic and social praxis, and indeed to human existence generally," then, they argue, the "overarching-meta-discipline of semiotics . . . can be seen as a local manifestation of a more widespread 'linguistic turn,' an attempt to reconceptulize the world 'through' linguistics" (1). And it has, primarily, been "through" linguistics that film semiotics has been conceived. Alan Williams has argued rather more pessimistically, however, in his essay on cinema in Thomas Sebeok's *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Semiotics*. Williams asserts that the centrality of the linguistic metaphor in film semiotics is a result more of the discipline's inability to fully contend with the specificity of the cinematic medium, an inability that has effectively reduced the scope of film semiotics, emphasising the investigation of a cinematic "syntax" at the expense of other aspects. "The principal task," argues Williams, "of any semiotics of the cinema is to construct a model of the mechanism or mechanisms by which films can transmit messages." But, he continues, "[a] spectre haunts this project: the iconic nature of the film image. . . . Comparatively little is known about the distinctions to be drawn between reception of a projected, moving image and that of 'real' events. [...] Thus, one dominant trend has been to investigate the syntagmatic aspects of film communication, where models drawn from the analyses of natural language seem more clearly applicable" (111).

As a potentially restorative direction for film semiotics, Williams suggests an American pragmatist, or Peircean, semiotic, which might provide a broader base from

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[1] Several useful overviews of the development and scope of a film semiotics are available. Robert Stam et al., have provided a rather exhaustive account in their *New Vocabularies*. Winfried Nöth devotes a section of his *Handbook*. There is, as well, the article "Cinema" in Thomas Sebeok's *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Semiotics*. Francesco Casetti and Roger Odin, in their essay "Cinema and Semiotics," in Walter A. Koch, ed., *Semiotics in the Individual Sciences* (1990), suggests a move to more pragmatic account of the cinema.

which to consider the cinema. While Williams argues that there are few extant applications, and no exhaustive considerations of the cinema from a Peircean perspective,[1] he nevertheless points out several potentially ameliorative qualities of a pragmatist semiotic approach to the cinema.

> (1) a flexible approach to the sign, not based solely on verbal models and not restricted to one level (for Peirce, a book or painting can be a "sign"); (2) a readily compatible tradition of philosophical psychology — which may possibly avoid the limited applicability of psychoanalytic models used to date (e.g., copy theories of perception and attendant mechanistic interpretation of spectator activity); (3) no rigid separation between questions of rhetoric and aesthetics. (111)

While (2) and (3) are worthy of consideration on their own, it is to Williams' characterisation of the Peircean sign, its distinction from the linguistically based Saussurean model, that is to be our immediate concern. It is according precisely to the flexibility of the Peircean notion of the sign, in its effectively pragmatic characterisation, that its utility, and its broader applicability, are to be found.

Peirce's writings are often characterised as notoriously chaotic.[2] Much of his work was unpublished in his lifetime, and the project of the appropriate collection of his works is still underway.[3] There is, as well, often a terminological uncertainty, as a result of the incomplete status of his efforts, and of the extraordinary lengths he went to in order to find the most precise manner of phrasing a concept. Nevertheless, there are a number of points

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[1] Noting that Peter Wollen's call, in 1969, for further exploration of a Peircean film semiotics has been almost comprehensively ignored, Williams speculates parenthetically that: "This is most likely due to lack of any institutional base, given the relative decline of pragmatic models in the disciplines of psychology and philosophy" (111). This seems to me to be an inadequate explanation, and ignores both the ever-increasing scope of a philosophical neo-pragmatism in literary, legal, and other studies, which I have detailed in Ftnt. 1, p. 7, as well as the increasing visibility of Peircean concepts specifically, and phenomenological considerations generally, in film studies. In addition to Wollen's summary of Peirce in his *Sign and Meaning in the Cinema* (1969), see Gorham A. Kindem, "Peirce's Semiotic Phenomenalism and Film" (1979), Teresa de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (1984) and *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film and Fiction* (1987), Gaylyn Studlar, *In the Realm of Pleasure: Von Sternberg, Dietrich, and the Masochistic Aesthetic* (1988). See also Allan Casebier, *Film and Phenomenology: Toward a Realist Theory of Cinematic Representation* (1991) and Vivian Sobchak, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (1992), as well as the Special Issue of the *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, "Phenomenology and Film" (1990).

[2] That they are so may be explained by Thomas Goudge's observation that "Peirce's semiotic is a science of enormous sweep and complexity. Logic thus conceived embraces nothing less than the total intellectual life of humanity. With such a panorama before him, the wonder is not that Peirce's work remains sketchy and incomplete, but rather that he was able to say so much that is pertinent and illuminating" (156).

[3] Max H. Fisch is the general editor of a chronological edition of Peirce's writing, a project which is only in the initial stages with, to date, five volumes covering the years 1857 - 1886. There a total of thirty volumes projected. See Peirce 1982-1986.

in his writings where the concept of pragmatism is subject to explicit definition.[1] Formulated originally in 1878, in the essay "How to Make Our Ideas Clear," the pragmatic maxim was rendered thus: "Consider what effects, that might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object" (5.402).[2] By 1905 the maxim had been modified, specifying the terms further, explicitly rendering *meaning* in functional terms: "*In order to ascertain the meaning of an intellectual conception one should consider what practical consequences might conceivably result by necessity from the truth of that conception; and the sum of these consequences will constitute the entire meaning of the conception*" (5.9, italics in original). We may pursue the question of practical results by considering specifically the main aspects of Peirce's semiotic, which attempts to outline, in as general a manner as possible, the means with which we are capable of generating meaning, understood in such practical and functional terms. While the restrictions of this thesis prevent me from considering his semiotic in its full extent, a brief *précis* is called for in order to suggest the manner in which my comments on genre are informed by Peirce's pragmatic account of the sign.

The Peircean tradition has been rather less influential than that of a continental semiology, yet is undergoing a considerable amount of reconsideration.[3] Working quite likely in isolation from Saussure's work, which suggested the possibility of founding a general semiology, extrapolated from, and having as a main branch, linguistics, Peirce's

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[1] In keeping with the very notion of pragmatism, Peirce was continually reconsidering and rephrasing such definitions. Efforts to determine which of the statements are the most legitimate will necessarily be fruitless, and miss the point. Central to Peirce's activity as a philosopher was his notion of the evolutionary character of knowledge, which is constantly open to reevaluation, and necessarily so. Accordingly, Peirce himself never rested in his own theories, always subjecting his ideas to a regimen of fine-tuning. This central aspect of his work has been the bane of those who would seek to reduce his efforts to an entirely coherent structure, as Nathan Houser and Christian Kloesel have noted: "Peirce was always open to the revelations of experience and was prepared to change his theories accordingly. Some of these changed dramatically over the course of his life; nearly all changed in one way or another. We cannot draw one consistent philosophy from Peirce's writings without ignoring conflicting passages. A tendency by some of Peirce's commentators to overlook this characteristic of his thought has led to much confusion" (xxiii).

[2] It has become customary to follow the divisions employed by Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss in their multi-volume edition, *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*. Thus, 5.402 refers to paragraph 402, Volume 5.

[3] Some recent works that have sought to reconsider the usefulness of Peirce's semiotic include D.S. Clarke's *Principles of Semiotic* (1987), which considers the histories of several traditions of semiotic. The work of philosopher David Savan, especially his *An Introduction to C.S. Peirce's Semiotics, Part I* (1976), has provided the basis for much subsequent effort in the elaboration of a Peircean semiotic. Recent writers on Peirce include Joseph Ransdell, Marike Finlay and Jørgen Dines Johansen's, whose recent book, *Dialogic Semiosis* (1993), I will consider shortly.

semiotic is a philosophical project, according to which he sought to elaborate a holistic concept of the sign. Rather than signs understood as objects requiring a science of semiology that, as Saussure envisioned it, and according to the concerns of linguistics, "would show what constitutes [them], what laws govern them" (Saussure 15), for Peirce, it is the cognitive process — semiosis, the means with which phenomena are apprehended — which is, more properly, the domain of study for semiotics. The sign, also called a representamen,[1] in Peircean semiotic, is only one aspect of the triadic process of semiosis.

The most crucial distinction between the Saussurean and Peircean sign is reflected in Peirce's famous definition: "A sign, or *representamen*, is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity" (2.228). As opposed to the two *relata*, signifier and signified, of the Saussurean sign, for Peirce there are three aspects of semiosis — representamen, object and interpretant — which correspond, respectively, to the 'sign,' the 'something' it stands for, and the 'respect or capacity' in which it stands for 'somebody.' It is by means of such a triadic structure that Peirce sought to theorize the manner in which our mind interacts with the world. The sign, for Peirce, is the means with which we may describe the conceptual apparatus with which we apprehend phenomena, and it is this apprehension — semiosis — which is the true object of study for semiotic. According to a brief definition offered by Peirce, "*semiotic* is the doctrine of the essential nature and fundamental varieties of possible semiosis" (5.488). It is such a notion of semiosis, as the terms within which material of the world may be mobilised semiotically, that has informed this thesis, and which may now be pursued in more specific terms.[2]

IV Intertextuality/Contextuality

Exhaustive as Peirce's work on semiotics may be, he was the first to admit that his own efforts were of a preliminary nature, and that there were a great many questions that he would have necessarily to leave to other, later semioticians. From a discussion of the logical interpretant, for example, in an unpublished essay on pragmaticism,[3] Peirce offers

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[1] Often Peirce would refer to the entire process of semiosis with the term 'sign,' within which was the specific element, the 'representamen,' which would itself be referred to occasionally as the 'sign.' We will consider the distinction in more detail shortly

[2] I include in the term "world" the imaginary realm which would include objects that do not exist in the real, physical, world. Mythical objects, such as the unicorn, fictional objects, such as Emma Bovary or Sherlock Holmes, and, importantly, theoretical objects, are equally understood to be subject to the processes of semiosis that I have described.

[3] Presented in Book III, "Unpublished Papers," of Volume Five of the *Collected Papers*.

an apology for his inability to offer anything more than "a strong impression" about their character. By way of explanation he submits the following characterisation of himself and his activity:

> My excuse for not answering the question scientifically is that I am, as far as I know, a backwoodsman, in the work of clearing and opening up what I call *semiotic*, that is the doctrine of the essential nature and fundamental varieties of possible semiosis; and I find the field too vast, the labor too great for a first-comer. (5.488)

Numerous subsequent scholars have continued, if I may maintain the metaphor, the work of clearing — clarifying and suggesting alterations to Peirce's formulations, pursuing his often provocative notions, choosing from among the often multiple renderings of key concepts. There have, too, been efforts to distinguish what is useful in Peirce's work, separating it from the occasionally eccentric digressions and postulations, in order, typically, to pursue the question of the application of a Peircean semiotic to a specific culturally elaborated sign system, to consider the consequences of such an account of the sign, as manifested within a specific context. The terms of such an application are provided by a recent work by Jørgen Dines Johansen, *Dialogic Semiosis: An Essay on Signs and Meaning*, which offers, effectively, an account of the Peircean sign *in actu*. Despite the breadth suggested by the title, Johansen's concerns are quite specific. It is an essay, he asserts at the outset, "on how signs transmit information between human agents, making understanding possible" (ix). While he admits that, on occasion, he strays in his discussion to consider non-human communication, "the main topic is intentionally produced texts, most specifically speech" (ix). "Text", though, is understood in a rather general sense, as the medium of communication between human agents — perhaps more specifically, as the shared ground for communicative situations. The notion of text is also understood to be potentially manifested in a variety of forms. This generality is supported by an analysis performed by Johansen, having elaborated a model of communication according to Peircean precepts, of a "specific semiotic micro system," "an intentionally produced semiotic" (x), the traffic light. It is according to the terms of his analysis, performed in counterpoint to a Hjelmslevian analysis of the same system, that I am proposing an approach to film genre, understood similarly as a practical, intentionally produced, semiotic micro-system.

A key aspect of such a system, as I have already noted in a preliminary way, is its network of intertextual relations, it institutionalised intertextuality. It is the *function* of such

a network *for* various interpreters (in the broad sense) that Johansen is concerned to investigate. The question of the activity of the interpreter has been central in this thesis — we need at this point, though, to account for such activity in rather more precise terms. We need at the same time to acknowledge the necessary limits of such activity, without, however, lapsing into either resignation — of the sort offered by Neale, so that the "idiosyncratic" interpretive activities of certain agents are necessarily distinguished from the more "public" and therefore more easily analysable generic formations[1] — or determining the terms of appropriate or inappropriate interpretations — as Altman does, warning us of the danger of error, helping us avoid falling into the "trap" of mistaking *Star Wars* for a Western — and without, at the same time, allowing simply for an easy autonomy, as Rosmarin's argument suggests, which would have interpretive agents performing their activities within a context that resists analysis according to its very interminability. It is, in fact, on the very question of context, that the remainder of this thesis will turn.

We have so far been guided by the essentially prescriptive observations of Rosmarin, who has stressed the knowing, pragmatic activity of the interpreter, such activity premised upon the knowledge of a text's interpretive history. Exemplified here by Carol Clover's purposively defined genre, the definition of which is executed by recourse to earlier definitions, which are corrected and adapted to the specific needs of Clover's project, Rosmarin has characterised such critical activity as necessarily taking place within an "intertextual world," a world "in which readings are expressly conscious not only of themselves as readings but also of previous readings, all of which have been generic but not all of which have used the same genre" (40). Rosmarin is careful, however, not to fall into the familiar trap of characterising such a world — a world within which we are able to make interpretive and critical claims as a result necessarily of the presence of previous claims — simply as 'context.' More precisely, it is as a means of asking a question, rather than providing an answer, that she considers the 'context' within which her knowing critical agent engages in his or her activity. Returning to her original example, from the

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[1] See discussion of Neale above, p. 63. Neale goes on to argue that "a distinction needs to be made. . . between those studies of genres conceived of as institutionalized classes of texts and systems of expectation, and studies which use critically or theoretically constructed terms as the basis for discussing classes of films. (Studies of *film noir* are obvious examples of the latter.)" (1990: 52). It's not at all clear, as I have been arguing, that such a distinction is necessary — on the contrary, it in fact obscures the productive and functional character of what Neale is calling "institutionalised classes of texts," and the theoretically, and idiosyncratic, classes. It is that both of them are *classifications*, in the pragmatic sense that I've presented the term.

realm of visual art, Rosmarin acknowledges that, "Gombrich's painter does not answer his questions in a vacuum. He answers in a context: choosing from among the various received schemata at his disposal. . ." (15). But, she wonders, what does this answer actually provide? "[D]oesn't this answer beg the question? Does it not simply replace a precise schema with the amorphous schema currently called 'context'?" (15). It does, she argues, until we realign the notion of context, transforming it from a vague and ultimately insufficient answer into a productive question (along the pragmatic lines, not surprisingly, of her general project), able to provide precise information. We must "recognize that 'context' is itself a terminological tool, which serves a distinct but limited critical purpose: it tells us what is or was possible, not what is or was done" (15). She elaborates:

> Put otherwise, it is an effective way of reminding ourselves that in any given situation the so-called determining variables number themselves into indeterminacy, that the painter and the critic alike have innumerable topics to paint or say and innumerable ways of painting or saying them. "Context" is not, however, an effective way of discussing either choice of topic or choice of terms: why, for example, Picasso painted the bombing of Guernica or [J. Hillis] Miller wrote about *Wuthering Heights*, why one painted in cubist terms or the other wrote in deconstructionist terms. What we explain and how we explain it are always contextual questions, but they are questions that can only be asked by context, never answered. In part this is so because "context" can never be sufficiently specified to compose an answer with power to persuade. More importantly, it is so because the answer is made by a person, not by an essence or schema. (15)

Her observations are a welcome corrective to the often thoughtless application of a term whose very vagueness typically provides only the appearance of an answer. But there are certain difficulties with Rosmarin's account. Rather than subscribing to her apparent characterisation of her critical and creative agents as fully autonomous, as free to choose from an innumerable reservoir of topics and schemata, it may be more useful to pursue the specification of context in terms other than those provided by Rosmarin. While we may never reduce the contextual possibilities available to an artist or a critic to a state of determinacy (and it is not clear why one would even like to try), we may, however, attempt to map the systematic nature of such choices. Rosmarin argues that while the elements with which an artist or critic fashions his or her own critical or creative project are "temporally prior," they are not, as a result, determinant. "Topic, schema, previous usage, audience, suasive purpose — all are constraining but none are necessarily so. All may be temporally prior to the act of making, but this priority does not make them logically prior or pragmatically necessary" (19). Recalling her earlier example, she contends that "[j]ust as Picasso need not have painted the bombing of Guernica nor have painted in cubist terms,

he need not have chosen to correct a particular previous usage of those terms, whether Braque's or his own" (19).

She is right, of course, if only in the assertion that we may never be able to discover what drove one artist to choose a specific schema and prior usages of it to correct, or what factors conspired to convince a critic to apply specific generic terms as the most appropriate for a consideration of a text or texts. We can, however, attempt to trace the means with which such choices are made, and the functionality and operation of the network within which they are made, without, importantly, rigidly constraining the activities of such agents, nor finally determining the range of possibilities in any (ultimately illusory) way. We may say, at this point, that it is precisely such limitations that have been imposed by traditional considerations of film genre, examples of which I have subjected to critique along just such lines. While Rosmarin's arguments have provided invaluable material used to substantiate such critiques, we must at this juncture attempt to extend her observations in directions that she herself seems to have blocked off.

Having characterised genre pragmatically, as an enabling condition for both producers and interpreters, Rosmarin does not consider the terms with which such pragmatism may be seen to function. Having had recourse to the dynamic and functional model of the sign as elaborated by C.S. Peirce, we may begin to consider such a question, considering the manner in which the various agents functioning within the interpretive network of the cinema are capable of rendering films as significant, by availing themselves of various prior interpretations, and of others roughly contemporaneous with their own, within a communicative situation, but one elaborated according to the Peircean notion of the sign. We have seen that the question of communication has often been central to considerations of genre, or has at least functioned implicitly, yet the elaboration of the process of communication have been fundamentally in linear terms, so that generic information may be transmitted to an audience, who may in turn transmit their response, in a familiar feedback pattern. Such feedback is seen to provide a corrective to subsequent transmissions, leading eventually, one gathers, to an ideal situation of noise-free communication (this seems suggested, for instance, by Altman's notion of a common ground, the site of accommodation between sender and receiver). As a result of such a notion of communication, it has, not surprisingly, been to the terms of the message transmitted that attention has turned. As I have gone to some lengths to argue, genre has typically been endowed with a constitution, understood to be available for the observation of the analyst, such observation generating as precise a description of the object in question

as possible. Armed with such a description, one may then identify a specific genre film, understood to be the message transmitted from filmmaker to audience. A typical statement on the basis of such a consideration is that made by the authors of a critical dictionary of communication and cultural studies, whereby genre is "[t]he recognized paradigmatic sets into which the total output of a given medium (film, television, writing) is classified" (O'Sullivan, et al. 127), insinuating that there is a right and a wrong way to effect a classification. They go on to explain that:

> Typically, individual movies, programmes or books are recognized as 'belonging' to a particular genre — say the Western, horror, or musical in cinema; or the police series, sitcom or soap opera in television. The upshot of this recognition is that the viewer/reader/critic will orient his or her reactions to what's there according to the expectations generated by recognizing the genre in the first place. (127)

So described, the process is rendered in familiar circular terms, and within an effectively closed system.[1] As a result, the activity of the viewer, of the interpreter, is circumscribed, subordinated to the specifically textual aspects of the genre, such aspects generated by the observation of individual films, so that we may accomplish the proper recognition. Our only other choice, in such a system, is misrecognition — either a legitimate misrecognition, when confronted with a consciously parodic text, or an illegitimate misrecognition, understood, effectively, as a failure to appropriately construe the film we may be confronted with. Continuing from the above quote, the authors observe:

> You don't judge a Western for not being musical enough, and you don't judge a musical for not being horrific enough. If you laugh at a police series, or thrill to a car chase in a sitcom, then either the program is deliberately playing with genre expectations or you are *aberrantly decoding* it. (128, emphasis added)

Echoing Altman's injunction, as well as Neale's methodological reduction, we are not granted the opportunity, according to such a (common) definition, to pursue an interpretation of a film (or TV show, or book) beyond the limits imposed by the object itself without having our activity characterised as aberrant, or idiosyncratic. There is, in such descriptions, an often implicit requirement of fidelity on the part of the interpreter.

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[1] The difficulty of characterising such a system hermetically is pointed up by the (by now familiar) disclaimer offered in the course of their definition, explaining why, despite the hermetic nature of the system, it may never be completely described. "It is hard to isolate," the authors explain, "the precise characteristics of a given genre. . . . Further, you can't isolate what kind of characteristics indicate distinctions between genres. . ." (128).

We must be faithful to the demands set by the genre, such demands communicated directly to the audience who may then either accept them or, aberrantly, reject them. (We may understand such a binary mechanism as simply another elaboration of the familiar feedback circuit.) We may, in this way, explain the typical strategy of genre analysts, which I have characterised as fundamentally descriptive. By describing the genre they in effect describe the ideal response to that genre, and may then explain changes and alterations according to the changing terms of the response.

What I am concerned to elaborate is a rather more ambiguous and complex communicative situation, within which no single message is transmitted, but where, rather, various interpretations are effected and are offered to other interested members within the same communicative context, who may accept or reject such interpretations — or, perhaps more precisely, and distinct from the feedback model, may render their own interpretations either by recourse to the same or similar material employed in the elaboration of the original interpretation, or to other material, so that there may be a certain correspondence of interpretation, and thus a certain agreement, or, alternatively, a dissimilarity of interpretation, a disagreement and situation of non-correspondence. The terms of such a communicative situation are rhetorical and pragmatic, and are, specifically, dialogical, such dialogue, however, taking place within a certain contextual and intertextual network, the forces of which will, of course, function often to constrain the various interpretations effected. It is, by way of conclusion, to the consideration of such a network, to genre understood as a culturally elaborated semiotic system, that we shall now turn. Designed primarily as a strategy for the classification, or ordering, of certain filmic phenomena, the terms of such ordering will be seen to vary according to the specific practical and rhetorical purposes of each of the various members of the system, the relationships between such members and their interpretive activity seen to comprise the contours of such a dialogical, semiotic system.

V The Dialogic Semiosis of Genre

In this final section, film genre will be modeled in a certain preliminary way according precisely to its dialogic and communicative aspects, the terms of such a model provided primarily by the work of Jørgen Dines Johansen. These concluding remarks are intended to suggest the direction one might pursue in order to provide a more exhaustive and holistic account of the functions of film genre, beyond the fundamentally immanent

analyses offered by most genre analysts. Such an application, however, would require a certain breadth and scope precluded by the specific limits of this thesis. Most significantly, a proper application would necessitate a much more extensive historical investigation than that offered in Chapter 1, and would require a careful consideration of the various aspects of the often quite complex relationships between the various interpreters and between the various aspects of their interpretations. We may, nevertheless, consider the terms with which such an application may fruitfully be undertaken, beginning with a more precise characterisation of the difficulties that have functioned in most traditional accounts of film genre. Having argued that the activity of the film industry, its efforts at classifying, and at the same time distinguishing, its products, has been hypostatised by genre theorists, in order, precisely, to be able to proceed with their descriptive process, and that this has involved a separation of theory and practice, we may now consider how such an effort at removing oneself, and one's theoretical activity, from the realm of the practical, in fact functions to limit the theorist's scope of explanation.

We have to this point effected a critique of several specific approaches to the question of film genre, each of which, in line with the traditional assumptions of film genre analysis, have endeavoured to provide as precise a description of the phenomenon in question as possible. Such analyses, as I have already suggested, have been premised primarily upon certain structuralist notions, notions which have, effectively, determined the limits of generic analysis, reducing its scope, insisting upon the isolation of the specific formal elements of genre. Writers on genre have, as we have seen, attempted to consider aspects outside the strictly formal purview necessitated by the structuralist influence, incorporating the activities of both the industry itself and the film audience, but have been effectively stymied in their efforts, unable to characterise the activities of such agents in terms other than as fixed positions in a linear model of communication, leaving considerable areas of interpretive activity — the aberrant or the idiosyncratic — effectively unexplained. We may, at this point, consider in more detail the specific shortcomings of structuralist-influenced models, according precisely to the expulsion of such realms of interpretation.

Central, of course, to any account of the elaboration of a structuralist semiology is the name of Ferdinand de Saussure. As Winfried Nöth has suggested, however, Saussure's individual contribution to the development of a *general* science of signs has been minor. In the development of modern semiotics, however, it is Saussure's name that looms largest, and the most significant model of the sign is that based on the structural

linguistics of Saussure and on its elaboration in the glossematic analysis of Louis Hjelmslev. Saussure's importance lies in his suggestion of the possibility, indeed of the need, for a general science of signs, and in his preliminary elaboration of the model of the basic signifying element, the sign. As Saussure envisioned it, a sign is the combination of the two *relata*, signifier and signified, whose relationship Saussure likened to the obverse and reverse of a sheet of paper, inextricably bound, one relying on the other for its existence. It is in the union of these relata that the sign consists, and it is only to these that the semiologist is to have recourse in his analysis. As Saussure explained, "the linguistic sign unites, not a thing and a name, but a concept and a sound-image" (66), these latter terms being alternatives for signified and signifier. The sign, in other words, is an entirely formal entity, a point that will be important to keep in mind for the discussion to follow. For it is according to the formal systematization of language and signification that subsequent work, particularly that of Louis Hjelmslev, would endeavour to establish a general semiotics, the preoccupations of which have significantly inflected later analyses of various cultural phenomena, beyond the realm of the linguistic.

Saussure's work, however, was mainly in linguistics, which he understood as a particular signifying system, though the most subtle and complex, among the many that would be studied in general by semiology. As Nöth observes, Saussure elaborated his sign model "only in order to analyze the 'nature of the *linguistic* sign.' In the semiological tradition following Saussure, this linguistic sign model was also transferred to nonlinguistic signs. This transfer seems to be compatible with the semiological program" (59). For while it was based on the developments of structural linguistics, there have, throughout the century, been significant attempts to broaden and generalize the Saussurean sign, according to Saussure's wishes, always, however, with the linguistic sign as the pattern. For it was language that Saussure saw as the primary semiotic system, after which all others were modeled. The 'transfer' is effected according to the assumption that all other semiotic systems bear a homological relationship to natural language, the systematic nature of which Saussure had conceptualised. On the basis of the assumption of such a relationship, nonlinguistic symbolic systems would be seen to operate *like* language, that is, it is essentially by analogous extension that non-linguistic systems may be studied by semiology. For Saussure: "Language is a system of signs that express ideas, and is therefore comparable to the system of writing, the alphabet, the alphabet of deaf-mutes, symbolic rites, polite formulas, military signals, etc. But it is the most important of all these systems" (16). Language, for Saussure, is the most subtle and complex of semiotic

systems, and as such should provide the means of patterning for all others. Reasoning from the premise that the greater the arbitrariness of the relationship between signifier and signified the more perfect, the more ideal, the system of representation, language, for Saussure, understood to be "wholly arbitrary" (though this discounts, for example, onomatopoeia), was understood to be prototypical.[1] That is:

> signs that are wholly arbitrary realize better than the others the ideal of the semiological process, that is why language, the most complex and universal of all systems of expression, is also the most characteristic; in this sense linguistics can become the master pattern for all branches of semiology although language is only one particular semiological system. (68)

The resonance of this statement can be registered in the subsequent work of a variety individuals in a variety of disciplines, including the structural anthropology of Claude Lévi-Strauss, the structural semantics of A.J. Greimas, and the cine-semiotics of Christian Metz. It is perhaps Roland Barthes, however, who is most renowned for pursuing an application of Saussurean semiology beyond the limit of the linguistic text while reasserting the primacy of language. Barthes followed Saussure's suggestion that semiology could and should become a general science of signs. His strategy was to employ Hjelmslev's distinction of connotation and denotation whereby the sign becomes considerably more complex and, potentially and theoretically, capable of being applied to the analysis of non-linguistic signifying phenomena. The model, however, based as it is in linguistics, could still only be expanded by way of analogy, and according to a strict hierarchy that posited language as the primary signifying system. Indeed, Barthes had even reversed the relationship suggested by Saussure, so that linguistics now became the science that encompassed semiology rather than the other way around. Non-linguistic cultural phenomena thus become objects operating as 'language' systems, and explicable according to the same governing rules.

Hjelmslev had adopted the dyadic Saussurean model of the sign, and in his efforts to produce an even more abstract and formalized consideration of its structure, expanded the two sides, renamed here expression and content, so that only the formal elements would remain for semiotic investigation. Each side of his model was divided further into expression-form and expression-substance, and content-form and content-substance.[2] It

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[1] See also Johansen's discussion of "Iconicity in Literature" (n.d.).

[2] The distinction, of course, is not as simple as that. Hjelmslev's model also includes the concept of purport, the "semiotically amorphous," or pre-semiotic manifestation of content and form. Purport is

would be to form exclusively that the analyst would attend, dispensing with the pragmatic dimension of the sign, that is, sign usage, conceived of as a phenomenon of the 'substance' aspect of the two planes.

Termed *glossematics*, Hjelmslev's attempt was to establish a formal system for the analysis of language. Language, however, was understood to comprise not only natural languages, but also any analogous systems of signification, or " 'language in a far broader sense,' including 'any structure that is analogous to language and satisfies the given definition' " (Hjelmslev, quoted in Nöth, 65). As Winfried Nöth observes:

> Glossematics is a formal and abstract theory, studying the immanent factors of semiotic systems without considering a pragmatic dimension of semiosis. By abstracting from structures of the material substance of language, glossematics aims at a level of descriptive generality which makes this theory of language applicable to the study of sign systems in general. (65)

It is, however, as Johansen argues, this expulsion of the pragmatic dimension that will necessarily limit the generality of glossematics. Hjelmslev expanded on the Saussurean notion of language as system, and established a "calculus" for language. The sign is stripped to its most basic elements in the belief that, as Johansen explains, "it is possible to analyze form without having recourse either to properties of the manifesting substance (e.g., sound) or to the objects of the signs" (1993: 34). Peirce's *triadic* sign model, not only takes these aspects into consideration, but indeed makes them part of the sign process. The "world," in fact, is not merely another aspect of the sign, but is understood to provide the very possibility for semiosis, and must, as a result, be incorporated into any semiotic analysis. This is in contrast to, according to Johansen's characterisation of the Hjelmslevian project, its "heroic attempt to analyze signs without

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transformed into the substance of form and content by the specific demands of, e.g., language, or other signifying systems, according to the system's specific requirements. An example, for Hjelmslev, of content purport would be the colours in the spectrum, while an example of expression purport, as Winfried Nöth (1990) suggests, would be "the phonetic potential of human vocal articulation, which is used differently to form the phonological systems of the natural languages of the world" (68). Such purport, then is the concern of other disciplines. As Hjelmslev argues, "the description of purport [...] may in all essentials be thought of as belonging partly to the sphere of *physics* and partly to that of (social) anthropology" (Quoted in Nöth, 68). Such purport, once transformed into substance, into semiotic material in the abstract sense, then becomes available for the specific use by a signifying system, i.e., provides the precise material of a specific semiotic system. The English language, for instance, consists of, in part, the specific lexical elements, as content form, while the expression form consists of the specific rules of (arbitrary) relations in the English language. Content substance and expression substance would be the matter, or purport, as "prepared," so to speak, by form according to its specific needs. Substance, then, is not non-semiotic, but is, rather the variable aspect of the sign, which, in its variability is not properly the subject of semiotic investigation.

worlds" and its "unrelenting attempt to isolate what it regards as essential to the sign" (52). In a Peircean semiotic, there is, as we shall pursue directly, no differentiation between signs and the world, each understood to be reliant upon the other, the world itself generating the need for and the possibility of producing signs, and, in turn, being available only by means of semiosis.

Johansen endeavours to describe, according to the hubris of such heroism, the shortcomings of a structuralist semiotics, particularly Hjelmslevian glossematics, regarding the project, based as it is on linguistics, to be less suited than a Peircean semiotic for a general application. Johansen begins by acknowledging the tremendous strides made by structuralist semiotics:

> I want to say that, in my opinion, the main trend of continental semiotics in this century has very much furthered the theory of signs and that the trend has led to tremendous progress in the analysis of linguistic texts. What makes continental semiotics an efficient tool for the description of linguistic form, however, is precisely what makes it less suited to found a general theory of signs, less able to describe the process of signification, and less able to account for the factors and relations that constitute meaning. (3)

Indeed, what Johansen considers to be missing from traditional structuralist semiotics, is so according to a conscious methodological choice. While such a choice has resulted in the production of a particularly powerful theory, it has nevertheless limited that theory's broader and more general application. Targeting, specifically, glossematic's express attempt to reduce the sign to its barest elements in order to isolate what is essential to its operation (and thus to the operation of all analogous signifying systems), Johansen carefully argues that the removal of what Hjelmslev terms 'substance,' in order to conduct an immanent analysis of the sign, is a move whose simplification is finally inadmissible, given the aspirations of generality expressed by glossematics. Too much of what is crucial to the actual process of signification is dispensed with following the glossematic model. Johansen's general complaint is expressed succinctly in the title of his first chapter, which addresses the structuralist and glossematic projects, characterizing their objects as "Signs Without Worlds." It is according to the preliminary glossematic move of dispensing with "the world" that Johansen constructs his argument. He concludes his opening chapter with the observation that:

> The structuralist and glossematic endeavour to get rid of phenomena of substance, whether the manifesting substance (sound, etc.) or the manifested, consciousness, the world, when it is regarded as a methodological move, may seem reasonable, because it

> facilitates the foregrounding of certain properties and relationships of its objects. Such a move, e.g., Saussure's breaking of the circuit of speech, presupposes, however, what is left out, because formal analyses are carried out in chains of signs whose meaning is already known. (51)

The very process of glossematic analysis, that is, is performed according to what it seeks to dispense with. According to Johansen, following Hjelmslev, "the ambition of glossematic semantics is to work out a restricted inventory of elements, constants, and their combination rules," and the goal of the general glossematic project is, "as it is stated in [Hjelmslev's] *Prolegomena*, . . . to analyze the immanent structure of language on both the expression and content planes" (40), that is, by excluding the content- and expression-*substance* and isolating for analysis content- and expression-*form*. Such a move is effected in order to clear the way for the arrival at the level of the minimal units of signification, *content figurae*, which are *not* signs, but are, rather, the basic material employed in the construction of signs according to certain describable rules of combination. What Hjelmslev is endeavouring, then, is to conceive of a sub-semiotic level at which an objective analysis of meaning and signification could be carried out. But such a goal, as Johansen argues, is a chimera, since it is impossible to step outside of semiosis. Even at the apparently basic level of content figurae, understood as "non-signs combined according to certain syntactical rules, thus making up the content form of a given linguistic description" (46), we are still, necessarily, dealing with signs.

It is according to the fundamental glossematic principle of partition and reduction, whereby the systematic nature of language, in Johansen's words, its, "structure of differentially, relatively, and negatively defined elements" (17), is made plain, that a skeletal, pre- or non-semiotic, form is produced, which, when provided with substance, becomes meaningful in a given context. It is this form that is common to all "languages," that is, all signifying systems. The substance, in other words, is a variable element, while the form is an invariable, and it is what is invariable that is the legitimate object of semiotic analysis. As Hjelmslev puts it, in his *Prolegomena*:

> Substance is thus not a necessary presupposition for linguistic form, but linguistic form is a necessary presupposition for substance. *Manifestation*, in other words, is a selection in which the linguistic form is the constant and the substance the variable. (quoted in Johansen, 16)

Johansen summarizes Hjelmslev's general position as follows:

> Hjelmslev regards a linguistic sign as a solidarity between the expression form and the content form, and in this way defines the sign as a purely formal entity. In his opinion, the task of linguistics and semiotics is to study the form and not the substance, i.e., formal systems behind the usage, which is regarded as a substance phenomena. (16)

The hope of isolating such a formal entity, isolated that is from its practical use, is shown by Johansen to be an ultimately unsatisfying and limited hope. The artificiality of Hjelmslev's project (and it is an artificiality he insisted upon as he sought to abstract the formal system of language) is achieved only at the price of a more complete and complex description of signification, and is based on a suppression, or a 'forgetting,' as Johansen would have it, in the form of the expulsion of the substance from the analysis of signification. Elaborating a number of tensions and inconsistencies in Hjelmslev's writings, specifically his changing determinations of what belongs properly to the realms of content form and content substance, Johansen notes that "his changing point of view stresses the general difficulty, or rather impossibility, of establishing a pure form of any given language, both on the expression and on the content plain, without having recourse to considerations of what Hjelmslev calls substance" (43-4).

As I have said, Hjelmslev achieved the level of a purely formal description of language and signification by means of positing the notion of content figurae, the non-signs that are the most basic element in the system of signification. Such content figurae are arrived at by the continual reduction of textual elements to the level of basic binary oppositions. Hjelmslev's belief is that there is a logical point of termination in the process of reduction which makes the use of language possible. While the number of signs that may be created through the systematic combination of figurae is potentially infinite, the inventory of elements (figurae) with which such creation is achieved must be limited. As Hjelmslev argues:

> in order to be fully adequate, a language must likewise be easy to manage, practical in acquisition and use. Under the requirement of an unrestricted number of signs, this can be achieved by all the signs being constructed of non-signs whose number is restricted. Such non-signs as enter into a sign system as parts of signs we shall here call *figurae*. (quoted in Johansen, 12)

And it is the process of the incorporation of figurae from the planes of content and expression that is understood as the *sign function*. Hence the designation of the sign model as binary, or dyadic.

Effecting such a formal model, however, is achieved only by effacing the act of interpretation that Hjelmslev ar[illegible]es finally disappears with the elaboration of a formal system. "In view of the selection between semiotic schema and semiotic usage," Hjelmslev argues, "there exists for the calculus of linguistic theory, not interpreted, but only interpretable systems" (quoted in Johansen, 27). It is a more recursive account that is offered as an alternative by Johansen, whereby the notion of non-signs is dismissed as untenable, as he accepts instead the fact that one is always operating within the realm of semiosis. As Johansen observes:

> Sometimes there is established an opposition between regarding linguistic content analysis as *hierarchical* and viewing it as *circular*. Hjelmslevian and structuralist linguistics' model of the sign is hierarchical, since the sign is analyzed as being built up by smaller units on both the expression and content plane. Furthermore, both the partition of the linguistic chain and the construction of inventories lead to the establishment of hierarchies. If semantic analysis is conceived as the explication of the content of signs through other signs, however, a certain circularity is necessarily involved, because different signs will mutually act as content for each other. It should be emphasized that this opposition is one of epistemological attitude rather than one of practical, analytical procedure, because in analyzing texts, the sign that functions as explicatory will acquire a meta-status within the context of the analysis. Likewise, linguists favoring an immanent and hierarchical semantics have never been able to set up general content inventories. Nevertheless, the choice of epistemological attitude has consequences for the general conception of the sign and for the methodological framework within which the study of semantics is placed. (45-6)

Hjelmslev's elaboration of content figurae, understood as the arrival at a sub-semiotic level — which amounts to a *meta*-semiotic level, the level at which the process of signification may be explained — is an attempt at describing *how* signs are capable of being interpreted from a position outside of interpretation. But the belief that one may reach such a point, where there are available for observation only the mechanics which make interpretation possible, is based on a hierarchical vision of language. Johansen's alternative circular vision avoids reliance on what he sees as the false hope of plumbing the depths of the hierarchy until one is finally beneath the sign level. What is actually occurring when Hjelmslev identifies the content figurae is a process of interpretation whereby another sign is chosen to stand for the sign which is apparently undergoing a process of reduction. As Johansen argues, the point of termination reached by means of reduction is illusory:

> In the case of *man, woman, boy, girl,* [earlier examples cited by Johansen] the lexemes were analyzed into two binary oppositions, male vs. female, and adulthood vs. childhood. That these content figurae are not only sign contents, but also *signs*

> themselves, is simply beyond doubt. It might be objected that even if this is unquestionably true, further analysis might end up with elementary units that really are not signs. I think that even this hope has to be given up. If you try, for example, to analyze *male* into smaller units you will get something like ". . . sexual characteristics belonging to an organism distinguishing it from . . .," and if you try *sexual*, you will get something like ". . . characters connected with the reproductive function of . . ." If this phenomenon is generalized, we can formulate the dogma that *any specification of the content of the sign has to be worded in other signs*. It should be added that this *wording in other signs* is by no means accidental, since there is no way of avoiding it. (46)

According to such an 'epistemological attitude,' "neither content nor meaning can be conceived and analyzed immanently because content and meaning appear in the interplay between the structure of language and what Hjelmslev calls substance" (48). What Hjelmslev seeks to dispense with, in other words, are the very terms without which his analysis would be unable to proceed. (That he *may* proceed is so as a result of the 'forgetting' noted above by Johansen.) As for Hjelmslev's claim of the existence, for the calculus of linguistic theory, of "not interpreted, but only interpretable, systems," as Johansen notes, "it works on analyzed languages, i.e., on systems that are not only interpretable, but in fact always interpreted" (52). It is this key aspect, that of interpretation, that is taken into consideration by a triadic sign model, conceptualised, by Peirce, as the third aspect of semiosis, the *interpretant*. In opposition to the hierarchical attitude of the structuralist or glossematic project, the triadic model regards the semiotic process, as well as its analysis, as circular or, more precisely, recursive, as composed, that is, entirely of signs, and operating within the realm of substance. "By neglecting the referential and communicative aspects of language," argues Johansen, that is, the pragmatic dimension, according to its formal abstraction, "structuralism and glossematics, according to the standpoint expressed here, are not able to explain how language means something" (52). While such analyses have certainly led to a greater understanding of the properties of language, their limits are those consciously imposed according to the needs of formalism. The structuralist and glossematic project, as Johansen acknowledges, "was a valuable enterprise because it enlightened us about the intrasystemic properties of language, but in its unrelenting attempt to isolate what it regards as essential to the sign, its efforts to distinguish the wheat from the tares, made it clear the price was too high" (52). Eschewing such limitations, Peirce's model, rooted in philosophy rather than linguistics and envisioned in triadic as opposed to dyadic terms, may be seen to be a more powerful tool of investigation. Rather than an immanent and restricted analysis of the sign process, Peirce

considers the goal of semiotics to be the study of the manner in which signs are used, that is, semiosis.

It is precisely the question of semiosis that has been evacuated from most traditional accounts of film genre, by theorists who have endeavoured to insulate themselves from the processes that they have sought to describe, unwilling to admit the constitutive and transformative power of their own activity — their methodological assumptions, in large measure, provided by the terms of a formalist semiology. Concerned with rendering a basically immanent analysis of their object, they have discarded precisely those aspects of the process of semiosis that provide the possibility of understanding the terms with which genre functions to produce meaning in a film or films for an interpreter or interpreters. This may go a long way towards explaining why there has been a constant sense of anxiety among genre analysts and theorists, for whom the exhaustive description of genre has been the primary goal, such a goal being, as I have argued, ultimately out of reach. It is such an anxiety that is registered by the comments that initiate this thesis, and which has resulted in various elaborate excuses for the inability of genre theorists to ever bring their descriptions to an end despite the claim (whether explicit or implicit) to be able to do so. We may now, however, once we have concluded that there is no place outside semiosis, attend to the manner in which signs are used in the generic project, and to what ends, incorporating into our considerations the critical and theoretical activity of genre theorists and critics, understanding them as participants within the very system they have sought to describe.

I have characterised film genre, earlier in my argument, as a cultural dialogue — or, as we may now say rather more precisely, as a system of knowledges employed by interlocutors within a culturally produced dialogue — a notion which I may now, by recourse specifically to the elaborations of the Peircean sign by Johansen, pursue in some more detail. The concept of dialogue is of course fundamentally communicative, and in the most basic sense we may conceive of genre as a (more or less) extant system of communication. But the process of communication is not as straightforward as most linear models (See Fig. 23), representing the transmission of a message from a sender to a receiver, would suggest.

Rather than understanding information to be transmitted, which implies that — despite the potential for various sorts of interference, or noise through which the information must travel, or various repertoires to which each agent may have recourse in

the process of information exchange — there is an actual, extant message to be exchanged,

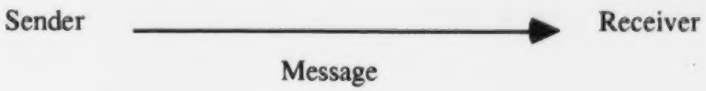

Fig. 23 Traditional Model of Communication — reduced here to its most schematic form.

it is perhaps more accurate to characterise communication in rather more complex terms, as a dialogical situation within which the communicants effect individual interpretations of a film as a certain kind of object, as a genre film — the utterer/addresser communicating his or her interpretation, in response to which the interpreter/addressee will generate another interpretation, which will correspond in certain, but not all, aspects. Johansen has provided the main terms of such a model, according to which we may see the manner in which signs may be used by potential interlocutors. What he has elaborated, effectively, is a model of communication based upon a triadic sign rather than a dyadic one, and based upon the Peircean notion of the sign as the only means available for the generation and

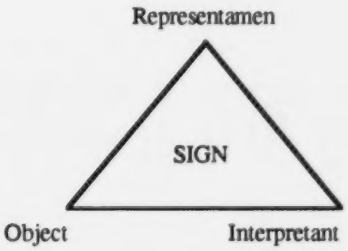

Fig. 24 The Sign as Triadic Relation of the Elements *Representamen, Object* and *Interpretant*

communication of knowledge. Armed with such a notion of the sign, rendered according to its traditional graphical representation (See Fig. 24), Johansen has incorporated the two elements, adapted from communication theory, of the utterer and the interpreter, who are

represented within the model of semiosis as the addresser and addressee, understood, as such, to be themselves signs.[1]

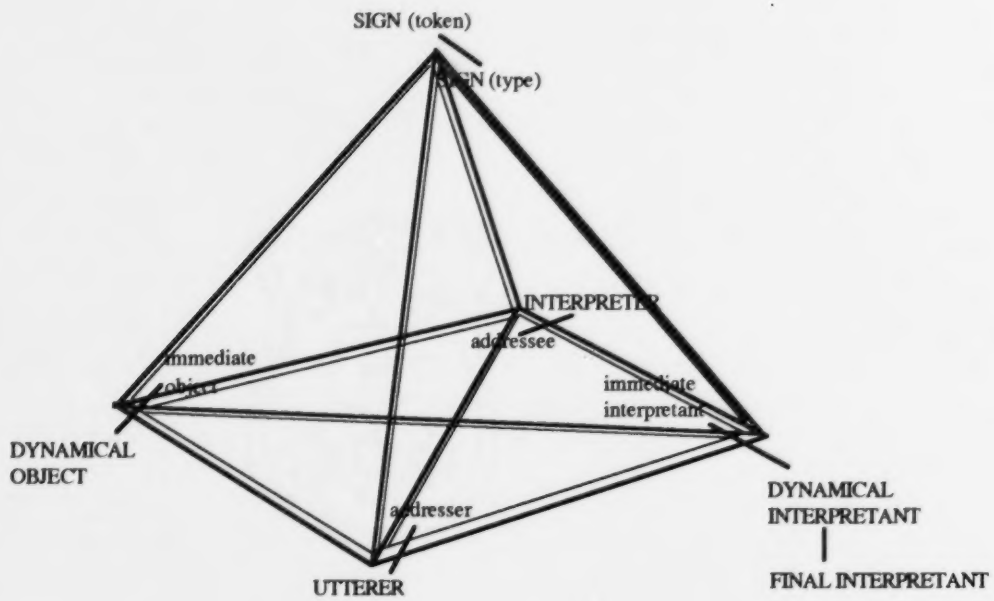

Fig. 25 Johansen's Model of Dialogic Semiosis

Once combined, relating each of the elements graphically with the others, the familiar semiotic triangle is thus rendered as a pyramid (See Fig. 25), with ten distinct axes, according to which one may consider the various dyadic relationships between the specific elements at each of the five vertices. There are, similarly, ten planes of the pyramid (produced by dissecting the pyramid at each of the axes), each of which delimits

[1] Cf. Peirce: "[T]here is no element whatever of man's consciousness which has not something corresponding to it in the word; and the reason is obvious. It is that the word or sign which man uses *is* the man himself. For, as the fact that every thought is a sign, taken in conjunction with the fact that life is a train of thought, proves that man is a sign; so, that every thought is an ***external*** sign, proves that man is an external sign. That is to say, the man and the external sign are identical, in the same sense in which the words ***homo*** and ***man*** are identical. Thus my language is the sum total of myself; for the man is the thought" (5.314).

the triadic relationships between the points on the vertices.[1] Attendance to any of the axes or planes will provide the means to analyse the various relations between the sign (representamen) and other aspects of semiosis.

As opposed to traditional models of communication, Johansen's model is designed to demonstrate the complexity of dialogic communication. Even if it is understood to represent a face-to-face dialogue between two individuals, the most basic and apparently most simple communicative situation, it demonstrates the complications with which such a situation is necessarily fraught. Unlike the simple linear models of communication which posit a one-way movement of information from sender to receiver, or at most a two-way model of information correction, this represents two agents, sharing a *common ground*, and inhabiting a *universe of discourse* (both Peircean concepts), each employing signs in an endeavour to reach some sort of practical understanding. What it proposes is communication as a continual "process of inquiry" (Johansen 1989: 250), as each of the interlocutors in a cultural dialogue propose their interpretation of a dynamical object, offering their proposal to other interested parties within the communicative or semiotic situation, who attempt to match it to their own interpretations. Such matches, however, will always necessarily fall short of perfection, since in each case recourse is made to varying regimes of knowledge, to a variety of intertexts — that is, to specific interpretants — some aspects of which may be shared by the interlocutors, but which *must always* vary to some degree or other (and which may potentially be utterly dissimilar). This fact is represented in the diagram of the semiotic pyramid by the double lines, so that there are in fact two pyramids, corresponding to the distinct activities of both the utterer and the interpreter, which suggest the inevitable gap between the interpretive activity of each of the participants within the process of dialogic semiosis.[2]

In the rendering of the semiotic pyramid, Johansen incorporates the Peircean distinctions of each of the aspects of the sign process, so that the object and the interpretant are understood according to their status as signs within the process of semiosis — the immediate object and interpretant — as well as their ideal counterparts, outside of semiosis and therefore beyond semiotic apprehension — namely the dynamical object and the dynamical and final interpretants. The addresser and addressee are similarly differentiated

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[1] See Appendix I for the specific characterisations provided by Johansen for each of the axes and triangular planes.

[2] It may need to be stressed at this point that the utterer, in order to in fact produce an utterance, must first render his own interpretation.

from their counterparts outside semiosis, the utterer and interpreter, both of whom may only have access to themselves and to the other once they are rendered as signs within semiosis. The distinction may be understood according to the notions discussed above, that one may, that is, never transcend the realm of signification. The existence of such a realm may, however, be *posited* in the process of generating the immediate object and interpretant, but needs always to be regarded precisely as a positing. The importance of this distinction, and the consequences of disregarding it, will be considered directly.

Having applied the model to literature, or literary studies, Johansen has considered literature "as an institution" or as a "specific kind of linguistic communication," one that "explains why we so often run into difficulties in attempting to determine [literature's] meanings" (1989: 250). The basic mechanism of the literary institution is the continual dialogue between members of that institution, all of whom are seeking to communicate their understandings of texts — in the form of immediate objects and by recourse to immediate interpretants — to others in (and, occasionally, outside of) the institution, such communication, importantly, understood according to the model of dialogic semiosis. The plurality of meaning often seen to obtain within literary studies may be explained according to the typical result of miscommunication that such a model suggests, since each agent at the opposite poles of communication will have fashioned his or her own immediate object, in an (ideal) effort to arrive at a collectively posited dynamical object. In the course of human communication, however, such an arrival will always remain necessarily ideal. The question of meaning, then, is more adequately thought of in pragmatic terms, as the constantly changing status of negotiation between the member of the institution. As Johansen argues, "the meaning of a text (or any part of it) cannot be reduced to the immanent study of semantic structures. The meaning is rather the interplay of all elements and relationships of the interpretive network" (1989: 248) — i.e. semiosis.

Johansen has considered another, apparently more simple, communicative system — the traffic light — and has found it to be fraught with the same sorts of difficulties, or, in more positive terms, to function according to the same sort of potential plurality as the system of literary studies, once it is conceived in all its complexity, in fully functional and pragmatic terms. It is, however, a system whose plurality is quite consciously and quite considerably constrained, in order that there be as complete agreement as possible on the terms of the dynamical object — that is to say, that there be as much correspondence as possible between alternative immediate objects — such agreement or correspondence serving certain important practical ends, in this case the safe and efficient movement of

traffic. As we shall see, there are similar authoritatively determined constraints that obtain within the system of film genre, the purposes of which are not so immediately apparent as those of the traffic light, nor are they as singular. We shall see, further, that those authorities within the system of film genre who are effecting such constraints, specifically the sorts of genre theorists and critics whose activities we have subjected to critique, are doing so without understanding or admitting to the rhetorical aims of their efforts. Rather than conceiving of their activities as instances of an ongoing process of negotiation over the status of immediate objects, such negotiation undertaken according to the positing of a dynamical object, their project is understood to be the faithful description of such a posited object (which, in effect, is a reification). We may pursue these difficulties further by continuing our consideration of Johansen's pragmatic interpretation of the traffic light.

Johansen's project is counterposed to the Hjelmslevian analysis, which, as a self-consciously *formal* analysis of the "language" of the traffic light system, necessarily excludes any elements that are deemed irrelevant to the structural constitution of the signifying system. Johansen is concerned to account for the system according, primarily, to its functionality, which means he must take into account the questions of meaning, speaker (utterer) and listener (interpreter). Counterposed, as I have said, to a Hjelmslevian, glossematic, analysis of the same system, Johansen considers the traffic light not merely as a simple code, with which a specific alternating message may be transmitted — namely either to stop or to proceed, corresponding to the red and green lights — with an accompanying mediating message — the amber light, warning of an imminent change in the primary message. Concerned to understand the context within which such codings are rendered meaningful, Johansen undertakes to present the system of the traffic light according to the terms of the interpretations of such codes by the various interested parties, and according to the specific purposes of such parties, who will have recourse to certain interpretive protocols (interpretants). Noting that the traffic light is interpreted by road users, such interpretation rendered according to intertextual reference by the users to the initial legal, authorised, interpretation of the traffic light by the lawful authorities (writing in Denmark, the specific text for Johansen is the Danish Road Traffic Act), and that the goal of each of the interpretations is to provide some order to the flow of traffic, Johansen is able to provide a characterisation of the traffic light in pragmatic and functional, and, importantly, triadic terms, as

> a system designed to transmit behavioral imperatives according to preestablished rules for traffic regulation. . . . [I]t links together three different, in this case,

> interdependent codes: the actual expression s-codes of traffic light, its linguistic interpretation as laid down in the government notice, and the actual behaviour of the road users. This is why it [is], strictly speaking, an inadmissible simplification to employ the dyadic sign concept (and models) of glossematics and structuralism, because this concept, by only distinguishing between expression and content, does not account for the referential and communicative function of the sign system. (325)

Demonstrating that there is nothing intrinsic to the codes of the system themselves that will ensure their proper interpretation (and, thereby, the efficient and safe coordination of traffic) Johansen explains that the system's validity is a result of strictly limiting the potential latitude of interpretation by mandating a single authorised interpretation (the Road Traffic Act, functioning as the only legitimate interpretant, as, that is, for all intents and purposes, the dynamical interpretant), to which sole recourse will be made in the case of dispute. The only possibility for allowing a misinterpretation to go unpunished is, rather than questioning the agreed upon meaning, allowing for the possibility of extenuating circumstances (a possibility which is typically included as such within the official interpretation). When a refusal to abide by the authorised interpretation is met with acquittal, he explains, it is not by choosing to accept the alternative interpretation chosen by the driver in question, who has run the red light, but "for other reasons, and they all have to do with the specific circumstances of the violation (the condition of the road, the behavior of the other road users, cases of emergency, etc.)" (335). He goes on to insist that it is "[t]his lack of interpretive latitude together with the legal enforcement of the rules [that] ensures its general validity" (335), as opposed to any specific immanent property of the system itself. Pursuing the notion further he adds that "[a]nother way of ensuring validity is by teaching. All adult members of Danish society are not only supposed to know how to interpret the lights, they are obliged to know because they have learned it in school. Furthermore, to get a driver's license road users have to pass an examination about traffic regulations" (335). Validity, that is, is derived from the very communicative efforts of those involved in the system, which is to say, in their very interpretive activity, rather than in any immanent value seen to be possessed by the system's codes.

There is, in other words, a concerted and generalised effort on the part of society to clearly elaborate the terms with which the codes utilised in this specific system will be interpreted, in order, precisely, to govern our behaviours as drivers and road users. The effort consists, in the first instance, in strictly limiting the latitude of interpretation, a limitation undergirded by the authoritative and punitive power of the state, and, in the second instance, in attempting to communicate the terms of such authorised interpretation

through education, accompanied by an effort to convince members of society of the potential benefits of so limiting their interpretations. None of this, however, suggests that the terms of the system's functioning are immutable. "It makes no sense," insists Johansen, "to inquire into the truth or falsity of such regulatory sign systems as the traffic light. If they are abandoned and replaced by other systems, it will probably be for reasons of efficiency" (341). Indeed, the system itself came about, superseding other regulatory systems, according specifically to the advent of new modes of transport, namely the automobile, the movement of which could not be satisfactorily governed by other earlier systems, elaborated within different contexts. Within the history of the automobile itself, further adaptations have been required, as changes occurred, as the car became capable of higher speeds, as the recognition grew that cars were required to share their routes with other modes of transportation, etc. The need for such changes will be registered in the frequency with which the terms of the authorised interpretation are violated, such violations eventually suggesting specific ameliorations. For example, the system initially consisted of the simple alteration between the two colours, red and green, with amber added in the United States only in 1918. There are also local differences: in Europe it is illegal to turn right on a red light, while in North America (except Québec) this exception has been incorporated into the lawful interpretation of the system. As Johansen explains, the force of change is derived specifically from the recognition of the changing requirements of those employing the system:

> The development of the traffic light is characterized by *differentiation* and *adaptation*. An example of differentiation is the use of separate lights for pedestrians, cyclists and motorists. The adaptation of the traffic light is exemplified by using detectors, placed in the road surface, to govern the frequency of the change of signs according to the number of vehicles passing, whereas the usual traffic light is governed by a fixed program (or by three different ones, for morning, day and night traffic). (335)

Such an explanation of a sign system that is otherwise so apparently unambiguous — where red must simply mean stop, and green must simply mean go — suggests the means with which we might render the system of film genre — also understood to consist of relatively unambiguous codes, the meanings of which must be available for straightforward description — in far more pragmatic terms. As we have seen, the assumption of genre's simplicity has led to a great deal of difficulty and contradiction, as writers on genre, proceeding on the basis of such an assumption, have in fact been faced with a far more vital and troublingly ambiguous situation, which they have attempted to

solve in various ways. Johansen's semiotic model, however, may be applied to the cinema generally, and to film genre specifically, in order to address such difficulties, by understanding genre to be a practical and functional system of classification and organisation. Like the traffic light, which has as its purpose the efficient government of traffic, genre is a system elaborated for the practical purpose of "governing" the cinema. And, like the traffic light, it is adapted according to the specific and changing needs of the system's users.

We have, in the course of this thesis, considered various terms with which the system may be seen to serve the diverse needs of certain interested parties within the discursive network. For the industry itself, the terms of genre provide a ready means with which to efficiently manufacture its product. For the distribution branch of the film industry, generic categories offer the means to market the products by at once associating them with a certain tradition, while at the same time, by combining terms or by elaborating new terms, differentiating the films, in order to make them interesting enough to prospective film viewers. For the critic, genre provides schemata with which to render instructive and enlightening interpretations, along the lines suggested by Adena Rosmarin's critical project. In each case there is the necessity for a certain interpretive latitude, while at the same time, in order to provide a suitable context within which such newly rendered interpretations will be seen to possess a certain validity, there are interpretive constraints that may be seen to function. Why else, for instance, would a filmgoer be interested in seeing a film if he or she is unable to relate it to earlier filmgoing experiences? It is the rhetorical project of the film industry to precisely identify such a relationship, while at the same time rendering in its own interpretation of the film certain novel adaptations, in order, hopefully, to generate interest on the part of the prospective viewer. The viewer, in turn, may accept the communicated interpretation, i.e., may render a similar immediate object, or may feel inclined to provide his or her own interpretation. It is here that the viewer may go to other sources of interpretation, seeking a review of the film, for instance, or desiring a more scholarly account of the terms of the genre that the film has been identified with. Here we may see the various competing figures of authority, each occupying the position of utterer, each vying in his rhetorical address for the approval of the film viewer, seeking to convince him or her that theirs is a more instructive, enlightening or interesting way of conceiving of the film or films in question.

In this sense, there is a quite dramatic difference between the terms of the traffic light as a semiotic system, with a single authoritative utterer and a correspondingly singular

purpose, and those of film genre, within which there are competing voices, each engaged in a rhetorical project, the goal of which is, typically, to convince a film viewer of the validity of one's interpretation. Without, however, the sort of punitive apparatus supporting the system of the traffic light, the various utterers must rely upon other means for effecting a sense of validity, and it is here that the fully rhetorical nature of genre discourse becomes apparent, and where we may understand the value of a self-consciously rhetorical genre criticism of the sort prescribed by Rosmarin. In the absence of a single, clear interpretation, sanctioned and enforced by a sole authoritative utterer with the means necessary to impose such an interpretation, the various competing utterers (and interpreters) within the system of film genre require other means for establishing validity. Such means are available only within the system itself, understood as a communicative network designed for the elaboration of terms with which the various interested parties may endeavour to organise, towards practical ends, the manifold products of the cinema.

Linking the interpretive activities of the various agents within the system, we may render, in a preliminary manner, genre as, precisely, a practically functional semiotic system, according to Johansen's semiotic pyramid. (See Fig. 26). As opposed to traditional approaches to genre, this model does not present itself as yet another description of genre, along the lines of my critique, but proposes, rather, an interpretation of the sorts of activities undertaken by various agents within a discursive network. The model may, that is, explain the operations by which notions of genre may in fact be generated, as well provide the means with which to evaluate the productiveness and usefulness of such models. We have the means, in other words, to assess the failures of traditional accounts of genre, as well as the means with which to imagine a more interesting, more productive and more holistic account of the system of genre. As a system, it is understood to be designed for the generation of generic interpretations, and to function as the context within which such interpretations will be communicated to other interested parties, who will evaluate the validity of such interpretations. Understood, then, to represent the interpretive activity of communicants within the semiotic situation, the model suggests the degree to which the utterer/addresser's interpretation — the utterer presented here as a film community, composed of various individuals with a certain degree of interpretive authority and rhetorical goals — will necessarily fail to correspond in all instances with that of the interpreter/addressee. There will, of course, be a certain correspondence, given the fact that both parties inhabit a similar cultural space, have been educated in the terms of film

genre, and , importantly, according to the fact that there are efforts undertaken to limit the latitude of interpretation according to the authoritative discourses of the utterers.[1]

The sense of the *validity* of interpretations effected within the system is achieved precisely by elaborating a discursive environment wherein certain interpretive protocols are effectively inculcated by those occupying authoritative positions within the network into the minds of those functioning as interpreters within the system, successfully enough that one is often inclined to think, "I know a genre when I see one." What a dialogical semiotic model may explain is the manner in which one may be led to draw such a conclusion, as well as the terms according to which one will understand the practical value of doing so. Each of us has specific needs in our attendance to the cinema's products, and will have recourse to the various sorts of arguments that are elaborated within the discursive network of the cinema generally, assessing each claim according to the degree to which they are able to serve our purposes. By foregrounding the practical functionality of one's argument, as Rosmarin prescribes, it may achieve a greater validity according to the very terms of the system itself. In other words, in a system that is designed to provide its users with appropriately functional tools of organisation and classification, Rosmarin's pragmatic critic will offer his or her arguments in precisely such terms. A good deal of the validity will derive, as well, from the critic's careful and economical use of material from other, previous, arguments, understanding his or her own to be an elaboration, or adaptation, determined by the changing circumstances of the context and the subsequently altered needs of the system's users.

What the model may also explain is the precise manner of the failure of most critical and theoretical genre projects to achieve a clear sense of validity, according precisely to their unwillingness to present them in the functional and practical terms of the system. We have already subjected the theorists considered in this thesis to a rather thorough critique. We may now substantiate such a critique by characterising their activity in terms of its failure to meet the requirements of the system. In the case of each we have seen how, by determining to present as exhaustive a description of genre, or a genre, as possible, they

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[1] It may be in these terms, according to the institutionalised intertextuality of genre, that one could fruitfully investigate the social and political aspects of genre, beyond the ritual and ideological approaches that we have already considered, which suggest a certain monological character to the situation. The question is really one of the degree to which the viewer, the interpreter/addressee, is provided with a mandated interpretation, and the degree to which one might understand such a mandate to be serving certain social, cultural or political interests.

have necessarily incorporated into their argument the means of its own undoing. In a system that requires, as a test of validity, an argument to be precisely mobile and functional, the sorts of theories we have seen, by refusing to understand their own *ad hoc* status, by in fact insisting on representing their endeavours as precisely not *ad hoc*, have necessarily failed to meet such a requirement. That this is so — and, moreover, that it is endemic — is demonstrated by the continuing complaints about the failure of genre criticism and theory to fully account for genre in any finally exhaustive way, given that this is their claim, and in the anxious, self-reflexive, statements by genre critics and theorists about their own inability to achieve such exhaustiveness. In effect, those theorists and

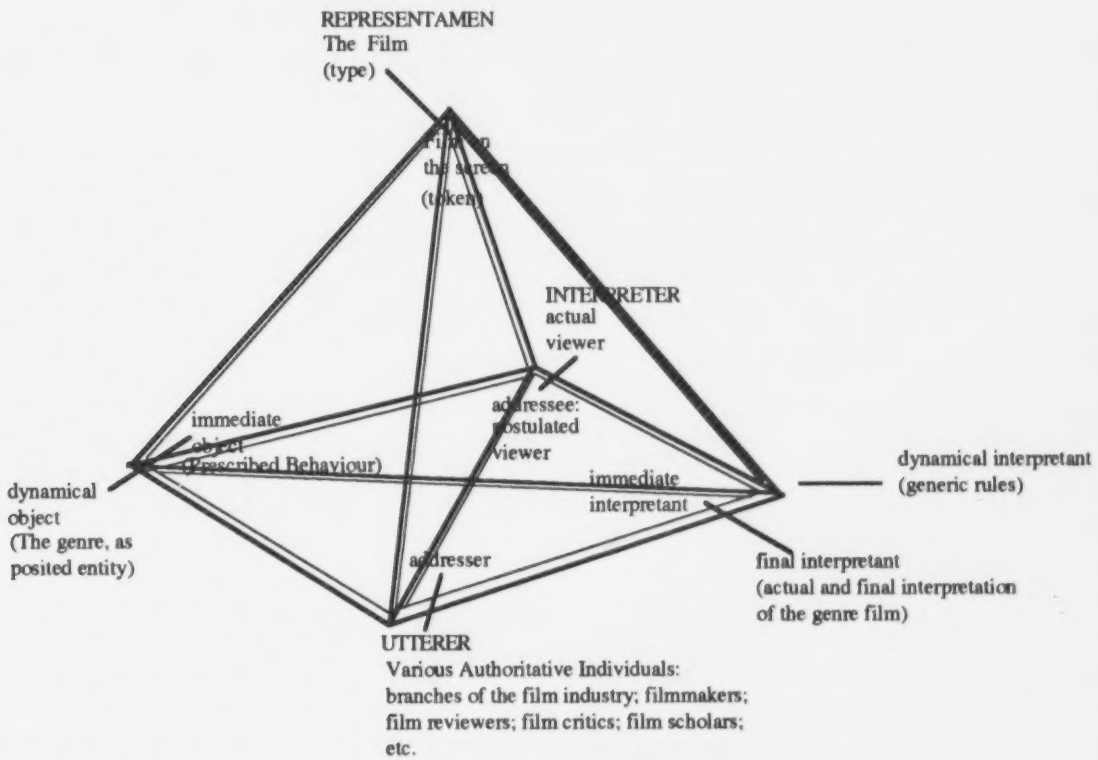

Fig. 26 A Preliminary Mapping of Film Genre as Semiotic System

critics whom we have considered are endeavouring to convince their interlocutors that it is the dynamical object that they hope to describe, rather than, as Rosmarin effectively suggests, producing useful immediate objects (schemata). Without the accompanying

claim that it corresponds in all aspects to the dynamical object, which, since it is outside semiosis, functioning only as a posited ideal, and is, therefore, beyond reach, the production of immediate objects may proceed apace, the details of such production conforming to the changing and multiple requirements of the system.

Here we may see how the model may also provide us with the means to render such objects, by referring to our status within the system, and linking us to others and to other interpretations, within a generally rhetorical network. We may investigate the manner in which various accounts may be seen to achieve a sense of (intrasystemic) validity, as opposed to the sort of (extrasystemic) veracity sought by the theorists considered in this thesis. I have in this thesis attempted to delimit the contours of the study of film genre as it is presently constituted, terms that, as I have shown, have been elaborated according to certain theoretical and methodological assumptions. I have done so in a manner that the difficulties generated by such assumptions would be obvious, and that the solutions to the sorts of contradictions and dilemmas I have identified would be clear. Through the course of my argument I have suggested several directions a newly conceived project of film genre studies could productively follow, widening the scope of genre studies, and incorporating into the system of genre itself the very activity of genre critics and theorists. The reconsideration of genre that I have endeavoured to present here suggests the means with which the cinema generally may be more adequately considered, as a culturally designed and functional sign system, negotiated by members of an institutionally constituted film community, or film culture.[1] Within such a film culture we may isolate specific semiotic micro- or sub-systems, which is how we may characterise film genre.

On the basis of such an endeavour, I may conclude by suggesting the various aspects of a system so designated that have become available for further analysis, the scope of which, however, is beyond that of this thesis. Johansen, on the basis of his model, has presented fifteen "basic properties" of an intentionally produced semiotic system, each of which may be considered individually — the extent of such analyses determined to a certain degree by the manner of system under consideration, every system, however, functioning with a certain, often unexpected, complexity. Johansen's choice of the traffic light, as a semiotic system to be modeled, was effected according not only to its specific exemplary qualities but also its apparent simplicity which his analysis served to belie. "The point in this attempt," he explains, "to give a reasonably full account of a seemingly simple semiotic

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[1] Such a film culture would bear certain similarities to Stanley Fish's "interpretive communities." See Fish 1980.

system like the traffic light is double: I have tried to show that this system is less simple than even semioticians generally suppose; and I think it is possible to generalize the results of this analysis, and thereby acquire a certain knowledge of the requirements of a text semiotics in general" (336). Similarly, I have taken the insights provided by Johansen's analysis and characterised a cultural phenomenon, the "genre film," in terms of its rather surprising complexity, in contrast to the typical assumption of its simplicity, understood often to be synonymous with a transparency. A preliminary accounting of the basic properties of a semiotic system, as enumerated by Johansen, and applied to the system of film genre, will suggest the precise degree of its actual complexity.

The fifteen properties identified by Johansen are: purposiveness; utterer; addresser; communicative intent; mode of the semiotic system or text; elements and combination rules; correlation between sign systems and interpreting sign systems, its immediate interpretants; object and context of the sign system and text; co-textual relations between sign systems, texts and codes; intertextuality of the semiotic system or text; addressee; interpreter; dynamical interpretant of a semiotic system or text; historicity of the semiotic system or text; and, final or infinite interpretation of a semiotic system or text.[1] The precise terms with which each of these aspects would be considered would require considerably more effort than I am able to undertake here, and Johansen's list itself may well require amendments and/or modifications, but I may end by suggesting the directions a future genre study might pursue according to a brief consideration of certain of these aspects in relation specifically to film genre, and in relation to the preceding discussion.

It is perhaps purposiveness, as I have endeavoured to demonstrate, that is the most compelling aspect of genre to consider. "Any cultural semiotic," insists Johansen, "should be analyzed with a view to its possible purposiveness, although its purpose is likely to be less explicit in most semiotic systems [such as the traffic light, for example] and also will probably serve multiple purposes (e.g., language)" (36). Genre's purposes are certainly multiple, and are, in their multiplicity, more or less explicit. I have in a general sense argued that a primary purpose of genre is to reduce the cinema's disparity, to provide some means of governance in order that it may proceed as an industrial practice. At the same time, as we have seen, the industry requires genre to be sufficiently mobile in order that it may elaborate new categories as it requires them, and to combine elements from previously elaborated categories. Similarly, the critical community requires techniques to reduce

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[1] Johansen 1993, pp. 336-341.

disparity in order to produce meaningful and insightful commentaries on the various social, cultural, political functions of the cinema, and genre, as adopted — and, importantly, adapted — mainly from the discourse of the industry. More specifically, for pedagogical purposes, genre functions as a means of distinction for those teaching the history of the cinema and the history of the criticism of the cinema. And again, and in line with Rosmarin's prescriptions, critical discourse also requires a certain mobility in order to produce its interpretations. With more attention, one could continue to generate a list of further purposes, either complementary or contradictory.

As far as the utterer/addresser, and the interpreter/addressee are concerned, these roles will be filled, as I have shown, by a variety of individuals at different times, according to the specific communicative situation, each possessing varying degrees of authority, none, however, possessing sole authority. The utterer may be an instructor in a university course on genre, and the interpreters the students in his or her class. In the most general sense, however, we may consider such variously authoritative figures within a film community to be addressing a variety of film viewers and interpreters, each of whom — both addresser and addressee — will have recourse to various configurations of generic rules and guidelines. Related to these aspects is the question of communicative intent. "The purposiveness of a semiotic system may," explains Johansen, "be directly communicated in utterances (directed to people that fulfill the criteria of addressees), utterances that state the intentions of the addresser concerning a certain subject matter" (337). We may, as far as genre is concerned, include here the sorts of publicity and promotional material we saw in Chapter 1 — movie posters, fan magazines, etc. — which will often contain specific and direct injunctions directed towards the viewer, explicitly directing him or her to interpret the film in a very specific way, as a Western, Gangster film, Horror film, etc., or, commonly, as the greatest Western, or as the first all-star dancing gangster Horror musical, for instance.

As far as the mode of a semiotic system or text, we may continue with our examples of promotional materials. "[M]odality," explains Johansen, "has to be considered in a rather broad sense, meaning the way [a semiotic system] addresses the recipients. . . .[T]he more complex the more modes it will probably possess The modality of the system will be decisive for the proper way of responding to it" (337). In addition to what we may call genre's primary modality, namely films, we can include the variety of modes in, for example, a movie poster, which will often incorporate verbal injunctions, of the sort described above. It may, alternatively, or, often, in combination with the verbal,

be visual in its address, employing certain familiar iconographic elements in the poster's design, contributing to the interpreter's sense that the film is to be understood, since there is a cowboy on a horse in a desert, as a Western. In addition to such popular modes, there is what we may call the journalistic mode, in the form of film reviews, etc., as well as the academic or scholarly mode, which will take the form, typically, of essays, book-length studies, etc.

The importance of the historicity and intertextuality of genre as a semiotic system cannot be emphasised enough, as I think is clear at this point. In both cases considerable work needs to be done, enlarging the extent of our understanding of, first of all, technological aspects of the cinema's history, the developments of which have contributed significantly to the alterations and modifications of the terms of genre, as well as the specific changes in the industry's institutional organisation, which can be seen to require different regimes of classification at different times, dispensing with the notion that genre cinema experienced a peak during the period between the 1930s and 1950s, insisting instead that the cinema has always been and will always be, in the sense I have been insisting on, generic. Second, we need to stress the variety of intertextual relations both within and outside the cinema, with an emphasis on the specifically functional aspects of intertextuality. Complaints about historical schemes such as Schatz's, insisting that there are examples of "formalistic films" prior to the self-conscious era, may now begin to suggest why one may find such examples early in the cinema's history, rather than simply pointing this fact out, a model of the system of genre demonstrating, in fact, that it is all 'intertextual,' in a functionally semiotic sense. We may also, by analysing genre according to its systematised functionality, avoid the kind of effort needed by genre theorists to reconcile the notion of genre as formal system and the historical variability of such a system, escaping the need to employ the kind or organic metaphors that have obtained, understanding genre's historicity in terms of the changing requirements of those employing the system.[1]

We may, on that note, leave aside the other aspects for future consideration, perhaps stressing that what is most instructive in an application of the model of dialogic

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[1]The hybridisation argued by Neale also becomes explicable in terms of intertextuality, thus avoiding the organic metaphor and the accompanying essentialism. The interpretation of a film begins with its marketing, with the terms of its advertising, such terms derived from both previous marketing/advertising campaigns and previous critical accounts. These are the intertexts with which the new interpretation is executed. This is why you will never see a film advertised simply as a Western, but as a new or the latest and best western, or a Western comedy, or Western romance, etc. New categories are constantly being elaborated according to corrections to previous categorisations.

semiosis to the question of film genre is the resurrection and rehabilitation of the role of interpretation. The gap between the two pyramids may be construed as providing a certain liberation, so that interpreters may feel free to consider *Star Wars* as a Western, to elaborate, that, is, in line with the project adumbrated by Rosmarin, and exemplified in this thesis (in a certain limited way) by the work of Carol Clover, an imaginative critical genre project, pursuing the links that such a complex system will suggest, and will continue to suggest.

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Appendix I

Analysable Aspects of the Semiotic Pyramid:
(Adapted from Jørgen Dines Johansen, *Dialogic Semiosis*, pp. 249-271)

The terms of the relationships between the various aspects and agents within the system of film genre which may be subject to specific analysis.

Axes of the Semiotic Pyramid:

1. Indexical Axis: connects the representamen and the immediate object
2. Conventional Axis: connects the sign and the interpretant
3. Symptomatic Axis: connects the sign and the addresser
4. Perlocutionary Axis: connects the sign and the addressee/interpreter
5. Axis of Semiotic Competence: connects the addresser/utterer and the interpretant
6. Experiential Axis: connects the addresser/utterer and the immediate object
7. Informational Axis: connects the immediate object and the immediate interpretant
8. Contractual Axis: connects uterer and interpreter

The axes between the Addressee and the Immediate Object and Interpretant should, in the context of perfect communication, be the same as the axes between the Addresser and the Immediate Object and Interpretant, but will, in practical terms, differ to a certain extent. The ultimate (and effectively ideal — otherwise the model would only require single lines, rather than the double lines which suggests that there will always, necessarily, be a separation between the two projects of utterer and interpreter) goal of communication is to create the same relationships between the Addressee and the Object and Interpretant as pertains between the Addresser and the Object and Interpretant.

The Triangular Planes of the Semiotic Pyramid:

1. The Proposition Plane: indexical, conventional and informational axes
2. The Communication Plane: symptomatic, perlocutionary and contractual
3. The Convention Plane: symptomatic, convention and competence axes
4. The Representation Plane: symptomatic, indexical and experiential axes
5. The Supposed Convention Plane: perlocutionary, conventional and competence axes
6. The Supposed Representation Plane: perlocutionary, indexical and experiential axes
7. The Interactional Plane: contractual, experiential and hypothetical experiential axes
8. The Intersignificational Plane: contractual, competence and hypothetical competence axes
9. The Informational Plane: competence, experiential and informational axes
10. The Supposed Informational Plane: the hypothetical experiential and competence axes and the informational axis

Appendix II

Model of Communication

An example of a more complex communication model, still premised, however, upon the liner arrangement of elements.

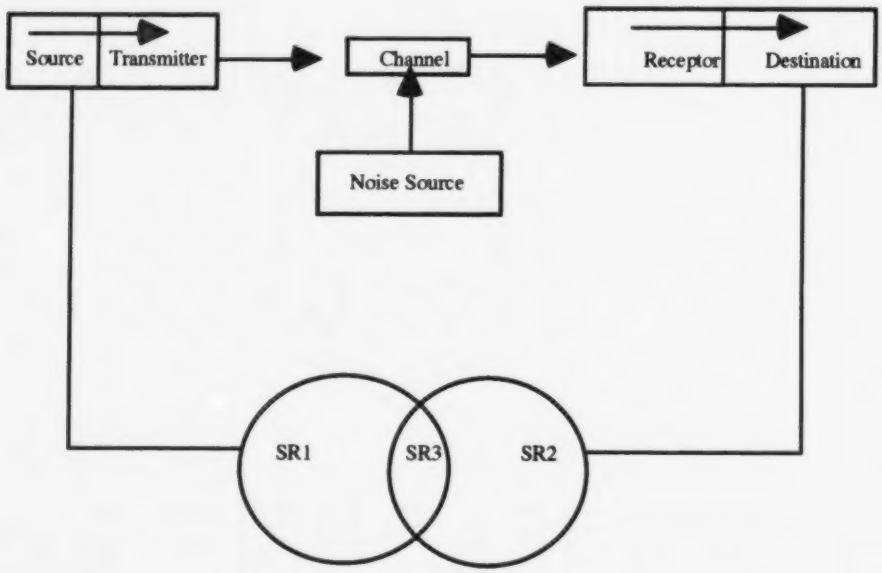

Fig. 27 Expanded model of communication, described by Werner Meyer-Eppler, incorporating the sign repertoires of both sender and receiver (SR1 and SR 2), and the portion of each that overlap (SR3).